

Global Muslim Voices on Islam – Democracy Compatibility and Co-existence: A Study of the Views of Sadek Sulaiman, Louay Safi, Radwan Masmoudi, and Muqtedar Khan

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Abstract: *Islam-democracy compatibility or Islamic democratic discourse – the relation between Islamic socio-political concepts and institutions and positive features and notions of modern democracy – has gained an impetus from the final decades of 20th century. Democracy in Islam is strongly debated, defined and discussed by the diversity of voices ranging from those who deny a connection between Islam and democracy to those who argue that the Islamic system of government contains a number of ‘concepts and values’ which are present in modern democracy. In this direction, this paper attempts to make an analysis of the views, arguments and observations of four most prominent modernist Muslim intellectuals – ‘Muslim Democrats’ – regarding Islam-democracy compatibility and co-existence. The views of scholars presented here include: Sadek Jawad Sulaiman, Louay M. Safi, Radwan A. Masmoudi, and M.A. Muqtedar Khan. It argues (among others) that more reflection, research, and (re) interpretation is required to reconcile the tenets of Islam with the modern notions of democracy, liberty, justice, equality,*

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and human rights as the Islamic primary sources throw ample light and guidance on these concepts and values.

Key Words: Democratization; Democracy and Islam; Compatibility and Co-existence; Reformist/Modernist Voices; Muslim Democrats; Shura and Ijtihad.

INTRODUCTION

The debate over democracy and its relation with Islam – reformist/modernist interpretations of Islam – and with Islamic socio-political concepts and institutions has continued for a long time and has gained an impetus from the final decades of the 20th century. Democracy in Islam is strongly debated, defined and discussed by a diversity of voices – proponents, opponents, Islamists, Islamicists, modernists/reformists, and others – ranging from those who deny a connection between Islam and democracy to those who argue that the Islamic system of government contains a number of “concepts and values” which are present in modern democracy (when defined in its real perspective). In the Islamic tradition, concepts like Shura, Ijma, and Ijtihad are utilized by scholars for providing an effective foundation of democracy in Islam. Throughout the Muslim World – from Pakistan and Bangladesh in South Asia, Indonesia and Malaysia in Southeast Asia to Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia in North Africa, from Egypt, Syria, and Oman in the Middle East to Central Asia – the majority of the reformist/modernist Muslim intellectuals accept the “term” democracy as well as the “consistency and compatibility” between Islam and democracy under certain conditions, i.e., within the limits prescribed by Shari’ah.

In the discourse on Islam and democracy relation, such questions as, “is democracy compatible with Islam?”, “what elements are present in the Islamic tradition in the service of democracy?” etc. are raised.

In this paper, an attempt has been made to bring forth the views, arguments, analysis, and observations of four most prominent

“modernist/reformist” Muslim intellectuals on the “Islam – Democracy Compatibility and Co-Existence” or Islamic democratic discourse.

But before going into the details, it is necessary here to shed light on the reformist/modernist “interpretation” of Islam. In other words, the questions, “Whose Islam?” or “Islam according to whom?” and “What Islam?” or “What interpretation of Islam?” need to be discussed/answered in the very beginning, because, in the contemporary world there are various interpretations of Islam; that is, there are multiple faces of contemporary Islam. And, the “reformist/modernist” interpretation represents only one strand of a “complex and multi-layered phenomenon” that collectively constitutes “Islam” (Kamrava, 2006: 3).

“Whose Islam?” and “What Islam?” – The Multiple Faces of Contemporary Islam

As already mentioned there are many different interpretations and ways of living Islam – liberal/progressive Islam, modernist/reformist Islam, politically activist Islam, fundamentalist Islam, conservative/neo-revivalist Islam, intellectual Islam, and so on – the main faces/strands of contemporary Islam, based on the different interpretations of the Islamic law and Islamic history, are four.

According to John L. Esposito, these four broad faces of contemporary Islam are: secular, conservative (or traditionalist), neo-revivalist (or fundamentalist/Islamist), and neo-modernist/reformist (Esposito, 1999: 681). For Mehran Kmarava too, in the broadest of terms, contemporary Islam has four main faces – but Kmarava’s terminology is different from that of Esposito. These are popular Islam, political Islam, fundamental Islam or Islamic fundamentalism, and Intellectual Islam (Kamarava, 2006: 6). Intellectual Islam – having its own internal divisions – consists of two broad and fluid strands: “conservative or neo-revivalist” and “reformist or modernist” (Ibid., 13).

What this reformist/modernist Islam is, needs to be answered, because to say simply that "Islam" is or/and is not compatible with democracy is perhaps misleading when we consider this simple fact; and, here, it needs some clarification.

Reformist/Modernist Interpretation of Islam and Its Advocates

The reformist/modernist interpretation of Islam represents only one strand of a complex and multi-layered phenomenon that collectively constitutes "Islam" and what the adherents of this strand/face of Islam – modernists/reformists, and those who argue that Islam and democracy are compatible are described, for example, by M.A. Muqtedar Khan, as "Muslim Democrats". They represent a vision of Islam and its role in human polity that is radically different from that advocated by orthodoxy, a vision whose very certainty has made it emerge, in recent years as the dominant face – among various/multiple faces – of Islam (Khan, 2006: 153).

They stress the need to renew Islam both at the individual as well as community levels, advocating a "process of Islamization or re-Islamization" that begins with the sacred sources of Islam: the Qur`an and the Sunnah of the Prophet (pbuh), but that also embraces "the best in other cultures". They see themselves as engaging in a dynamic process that is as old as Islam itself. Modernists/reformists wish to bring about a "new Islamic renaissance (*nahda*)" pursuing a selective and self-critical path (Esposito, 1999: 684). They "distinguish" between God's revelation and human interpretation, between that part of Islamic law which is contingent and relative, between immutable principles and regulations that were human constructs conditioned by time and place. They are "more creative and wide-ranging in their reinterpretation" of Islam and less tied to the traditional interpretations of the religious scholars, *Ulema* (Esposito, 1999: 684). They call for the modernization of Islam; and for them, interpretation and innovative *Ijtihad* are cornerstones of a "dynamic theology",

which is the essence of true Islam (Kamrava, 2006: 14).

Here it may be pointed out that the Islam-democracy compatibility theme – the discourse on Islam and democracy, or the Muslim discourse on political liberalization and democratization – is just one theme of the “grand narrative on Islam and the West”. Some of the important themes of this discourse include: “the threat of Islam”, “Islam and secularism”, “Islam and modernity”, “Islam and development”, “Islam, Peace, Jihad, Violence, and Terrorism”, “Islam and Globalization”, “Islam and Pluralism”, etc (Khan, 2006: 149-50).

This “grand narrative on Islam and the West” has posited several binaries to distinguish between essentialized notions of Western and Islamic civilizations. Both Muslim as well as Western historians and political commentators have meticulously constructed narratives about “the Islamic civilization” and “the Western civilization”, and in these endeavors their dominant strategy has been “to identify, highlight and even exaggerate real and perceived differences between the two cultural and historical entities”. Secular as well as religious scholars from both sides are involved in maintaining this discourse of difference, but Islamic modernists/reformists break away from this “grand narrative” and register their dissent through appreciation of democracy and arguing that there is more in common between Islam and the West. They insist that what Islam and the West share is vast and profound in comparison to what separates them. They are more creative and wide-ranging in their reinterpretation of Islam (Khan, 2006: 149).

The voices of these intellectuals – the majority of whom are professors, writers, essayists, gifted in the arts of letters and oratory – and their disposition is to be moderate and their political passions tamed and reasoned. What these intellectuals represent is a vision of Islam and its role in human polity that is radically different from that advocated by orthodoxy. The central goal that these reformist Muslim thinkers have set for themselves is to “reformulate and reinterpret” popular notions of Islam in ways that are consistent with and supportive of the tenets of modern life. To put in other words, the

central goal of these reformists is to make Islam relevant by articulating a jurisprudence that addresses contemporary issues and concerns. Islam is not the problem, they maintain, and neither is modernity. The problem is with “mutually exclusive interpretations” of Islam and modernity. Such interpretations, they claim, are fundamentally wrong (Kamrava, 2006: 15).

As democracy is an integral part of modernity and a challenge for Islam, it is in this direction, that this discourse – Islam and democracy relationship or Islamic democratic discourse – is so important and so recurrent.

Islam-Democracy Compatibility: Hotly Debated Theme/Issue

Democracy in Islam is strongly debated, defined, and discussed by the diversity of voices, as mentioned earlier. In the Islamic tradition there are various concepts that provide an effective foundation for describing democracy in Islam. To put differently, Islamic tradition, in fact, contains concepts that are foundations for the Islamic perceptions of democracy.

Beginning in the first half of the 20th century, when the Muslim world was becoming free from the colonial domination – the two significant challenges faced by the Muslim world were: first, how to govern, and second, how to face modernity. To be precise, these two challenges were the “form of governance” and the “challenge of modernity”. From the early 20th century, attempts have been made by Muslim thinkers in the recent past and in the present to discover an authentic formula for good and ethical self governance. A galaxy of intellectual stars throughout the Muslim world is striving to shape a Muslim understanding of “Islamic democracy”. That is to say, from the early 20th century, Islamic history has seen many Muslim modernist thinkers exploring the prospects of establishing an Islamic democracy. To mention only a few (modernists, especially of South Asia), for example, Allama Iqbal (1877-1938) – a strong advocate of

freedom, individuality, equality, and brotherhood - laid much emphasis on *Ijma* and *Ijtihad* for describing democracy in Islam, and used the term "spiritual democracy" for it. Mawlana Abul Kalam Azad (1888-1958), who used the term "Islamic democracy", laying emphasis on the concept of *Shura* (consultation); Mawlana abul Ala Mawdudi (1903-1989), who coined the term "theo-democracy", i.e., a divine democratic government, for describing democracy in Islam, laid emphasis on the concept of *Khilafah*. To be precise, while Azad laid emphasis on the concept of *Shura* for his interpretation, Iqbal's interpretation is based on the concepts of *Ijma* and *Ijtihad*; while as Maududi interpreted/ utilized *Khilafah* as the basis for his interpretation. But before going into details, another question that needs to be made clear is "what democracy is" - that is to present an overview of the origin, development of Western democracy - is also necessary.

Democracy in the Historical Development: A Brief Overview

Democracy is a concept that means different things to different people. It indicates both a set of values and a way of social life; a political system that ensures political equality and self-rule; or a system that allows the presence of equal opportunities and rights. So no definition of democracy can comprise the vast history which the concept connotes. Democracy, literally, "rule by the people", derived from the Greek "demos", meaning "people" and "kratos" meaning "rule" had its beginning in some of the city - states of ancient Greece in the 4th century B.C. notably in the Athens (Britanica, 1994: 4-5). Greek democracy was based on the direct participation of the people who decided their collective matters in the meetings where each citizen was directly involved in it. The development of democracy in Greece - regarded as the classical model of democracy - is a central source of inspiration for modern political thought as it was based on certain ideals, and respect for the law. In the words of G.B. Forrest, it

was based on two cardinal principles: (1) On an absolute acceptance of the laws (including the constitution); and (2) On the belief that everyone who was admitted to the society governed by these laws had an equal right and almost an equal duty to administer and maintain them (Forrest, 1966: 221).

During the 4th century CE Christianity played an important role in the spread of democracy, as with the decline of the Holy Roman Empire the Pope-emperor relationship was replaced by church-state theory (Shafiq, 1987: 86-87). And moving from past to the middle ages, during the Renaissance and reformation movements in Europe, the Renaissance and reformation movements in Europe, Nicollo Machiavelli (1469-1527) the Renaissance thinker, demanded the separation of state and church?? in his writings, *The Prince and The Discourses* (Held, 2006: 40). Regarded as the first theorist of modern state politics, Machiavelli linked the case of the forms of elective government and participative politics to the prospects of civic welfare and civic glory.

Similarly, the autocratic rule of the kings of England gave birth to new awakening and people started to oppose the despotic rule of the kings and demanded tolerance, freedom and such campaigns became stronger until 19th century Europe became more and more democratic in its institutions (Shafiq, 1987: 87).

During the 17th and 18th centuries revolutions took place in England, France and America - contributing greatly to the emergence of modern democracy. In other words, modern democracy started developing in the 17th and 18th centuries. The Glorious Revolution of 1689 of England is regarded as the landmark in the history of democracy. Thereafter, the American Revolution of 1776 (which stood for self-government) and the French Revolution of 1789 (which was the outcome of suffering of the people under despotism of French monarchs) led to the declaration of "Rights of man and of the citizen" which became the preamble to the Constitution of France in 1791 (Sharma, 1993: 81-83).

In the 19th century, equality, freedom and fraternity became the

watchwords of modern democracy. As noted by the Encyclopedia Britannica, “modern democratic ideas” were shaped to a large extent by ideas and institutions of medieval Europe, notably the emergence of “natural rights and political equality” during the enlightenment and the American and French Revolution. In the 19th and 20th centuries, “representative parliaments, freely elected under universal franchise”, became the central institutions of democratic governments and in many countries, democracy implied “freedom of speech and the press, and the rule of law” (Britannica, 1994: 4-5).

In the emergence of modern democracy, various political thinkers played an important role. Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), John Locke (1632-1704) and Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) popularized the ideas of liberty and democracy. Hobbes and Locke’s theory of the “Social Contract” aiming at preserving the Natural Rights and Rousseau’s theory of the General Will was a fillip to democracy. Charles Baron de Montesquieu (1689-1755), the French philosopher and political theorist, stood for the “separation of powers” to check autocratic rule. He distinguished between ‘the executive, the legislative, and judiciary’ (Held, 2006: 65, 67).

These ideas found expression in the American Declaration of Independence (declared on July 4, 1776). The declaration proclaims:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.- That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. -That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or it abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to affect their Safety and Happiness (Britannica, 1994, 6:283-84; Shafiq, 1987: 90-91).

In this way, democracy has emerged in the West as a system of government where the will of the people represented through their elites, protection of individuals’ rights, separation of powers, rule of

law and religious tolerance are regarded as its common ideals. The founding of these principles of democracy is, of course, a struggle towards individual freedom and social betterment as against the despotic and absolutist rule.

Thus, from the beginning of democracy in Greece to the revolutions of England, America, and France, and from the 19th century to today - as is evident from the above brief overview - democracy appeared in various forms indicating that the concept of democracy has changed and developed in the shade of a variety of social, political, and economic developments.

In the present times, there are many definitions and interpretations of the term democracy and throughout the history political thinkers have defined democracy in their own perspectives resulting in the fact that there is no universally accepted or clearly defined model of democracy. Consequently there are several versions and models of democracy which the world has experienced throughout the history, from the City-state of Greece to present day - direct, indirect (representative), functional, parliamentary, republican, federal, proletarian, liberal, industrial, etc. The philosophical roots of democracy lie deep in the concept of 'popular sovereignty'. Legal as well as political sovereignty was located in the people, that is to say, the people and their popular will was accepted as the real source of all authority and power (Ahmad, 2000: 4).

The other dimension, i.e., democracy as a form of organization, relates to a variety of self-government and popular participation in political decision-making, based on the principle of liberty, equality, and constitutionalism, rule of law, division of power between executive, legislative and judiciary and fundamental rights- including the rights of minorities, of freedom of belief, opinion, expression, association, press, and communication (Ahmad, 2000: 4).

It also becomes clear, from this outline, that democracy is a concept meaning different things to different people, and no definition of democracy can comprise the vast history which the concept connotes. It is an established fact that there is no more universally

accepted or clearly defined model of democracy so throughout the world, scholars and common people are actively involved in the effort to create more effective democratic structure of democracy.

The Process of Democratization and the Islamic Heritage

Throughout the Muslim World – from North Africa to South Asia, and from the Middle East to Central Asia – Islamic modernist/reformist intellectuals are earnestly and actively engaged in defining and interpreting democracy in Islamic traditions, i.e., they are greatly involved in developing and establishing an authentic and viable Islamic democracy, utilizing longstanding traditions, institutions and conceptualizations of Khilafah (vice regency/caliphate), Shura (mutual consultation), Ijma (consensus) and Ijtihad (independent reasoning) – the main key traditional concepts of Islamic polity. There is diversity of voices that discuss and debate “Islamic democracy”, relationship, compatibility and consistency between Islam and democracy – between the two systems of political thought – and various other issues and concepts related to it. This diversity of voices ranges from those who “deny a connection between Islam and democracy” to those who argue that “Islam requires a democratic system”. Those who favor that Islam and democracy are compatible INCOMPLETE SENTENCE; some (of them) extend the argument to affirm that under the conditions of the contemporary world “democracy can be considered a requirement of Islam” (Esposito & Voll, 2001).

While some scholars bring historically important concepts from within the Islamic tradition together with the basic concepts of democracy as understood in the modern world, many others view democracy as an “appropriate way” to fulfill certain obligations of faith in the contemporary world; and others see democracy as their “main hope and vehicle of effective political participation” (Ibid).

Various scholars have been actively engaged in defining, discussing, debating Islam, its institutions, systems and concepts; and

writing prolifically on Islamic doctrines, law, politics, science and economics. The Islamic Movements and its legacy produced “generations of Reformers” from Egypt in the Middle East to Indonesia in Southeast and from Algeria in North Africa to Indo-Pak in South Asia: Jamal al Din Afghani, Muhammad Iqbal, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, Chirag Ali, M. Natsir, Prof. Hakama and Muhammad Asad. The major “founders of the Neo-revivalist movements” from the pioneers (Hassan al-Banna, Mawlana Abu Ala Mawdudi and Syed Qutb) to present-day movements constituting the “backbone of the second and third generations of Muslim activists” across the Muslim world; among them: Sudan’s Hassan al-Turabi and Sadiq al-Mehdi; Tunisia’s Rashid al-Ghannoushi; Iran’s ‘Ali Shariati and Abdul Kareem Saroush; Algeria’s Dr. Ali Abbassi al-Madni; Pakistan’s Prof. Khurshid Ahmad; Egypt’s Hasan al-Hanafi and M. Saleem al-`Awwa; Indonesia’s M. Kamal Hasan, Abdul Rehman Wahid and Malaysia’s Anwar Ibrahim”, to mention only a few (Esposito,1999: 680-81).

This broad spectrum and diversity does provide important insights into understanding the complex relationship between Islam and democracy in the contemporary world. Despite the great dynamism and diversity in contemporary Muslim political thought, certain concepts are central to the political positions of the virtually all Muslims. In other words, contemporary Muslim scholars present certain concepts from within the Islamic tradition as the “operational key concepts to democracy” in Islam (Esposito & Voll, 2006: 23).

In Islam, speaking of democracy and the concept of democratic participation, of course, does not mean that the word democracy is a Qura’nic term explained in the Qur’an or the *Sunnah*. What it really means is that (a) the Islamic heritage contains key concepts, principles and values that are the foundations of Islamic perceptions of democracy and (b) its positive features and values (e.g., the rule of law, government responsibility, the general welfare, freedom, justice, equality, and human rights) are compatible with Islamic teachings. These principles (and many others) are inherent in the Islamic political order, as Khurshid Ahmad argues:

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The Islamic political order is based on the concept of Tawhid and seeks its flowering in the form of popular vicegerency (Khilafah) operating through a mechanism of Shura, supported by the principles of equality of humankind, rule of law, protection of human rights including those of minorities, accountability of the rulers, transparency of political processes and an overriding concern for justice in all its dimensions: legal, political, social, economic and international (Ahmad, 2000, 2).

Most politically conscious people around the globe express their aspirations for political participation, freedom and equality in terms of democracy. The issue of democratization is contested globally and has become the dominant discourse of politics. In this regard, for example, Esposito and Voll argue:

In theory there may be a number of methods for increasing participation of the people in government and for providing a sense of viable popular empowerment. However, at the end of the twentieth century, the most widely accepted way of expressing these desires is the demand for democracy. It is the broad heritage of concepts and images associated with democracy that provide the foundations for democratic revolutions and movements around the globe (Esposito & Voll, 2006, 13; Italics emphasized added).

It may be pointed out that majority of these Muslim intellectuals define and interpret democracy in Islamic terminology. For example, according to Prof. Khurshid Ahmad, if democracy means the right of a people to “self-determination and self-fulfillment” that is what Islam and Muslims have been striving for, nothing more and nothing less (Ahmad, 2000: 20). In his view real democratization means giving the people a chance to freely fashion their affairs according to their ideals and aspirations. According to Fateh A. Abdel Salam, the “pure idea” of democracy is the government of the whole people by the whole people, equally represented (Salam, 2005, 86). While as many argue that if democracy is meant a system of justice, freedom, equality, and human rights, Islam has the inclination and capacity to work them better (Khatab & Bouma, 2007, 40).

Muslim Modernists/Democrats on Islam - Democracy

Compatibility

The relationship between Islam and democratization is a very important element in the contemporary Muslim world's political dynamics. How this aspiration is defined reveals the great diversity within this vast region, as well as the many ways of working toward democratizing its polities. From the Middle East and North Africa to South and Southeast Asia, Muslims pursue this effort by cooperating with the existing authorities – republicans, royal families, and authoritarian dictators – found in societies that are pluralistic and relatively homogeneous as well as in states that are either wealthy or poor. As the desire for democratization, along with the continuing resurgence of Islam, exists in a dynamic global context, so will the demand and desire for democracy remain widespread in global affairs.

A majority of the Muslim countries today are the most diverse in the forms of political systems/governmental types they employ: dictatorships and sham democracies in Egypt, Sudan, and Tunisia (until the fall of Ben Ali in January 2011), secular democracy in Turkey and pluralist democracies in Malaysia and Bangladesh, monarchies in the Gulf, and an Islamic state/republic (a sort of theo-democracy) in Iran. Such diversity shows that Islam has enough intellectual and ideological resources to justify a wide range of governing models. History itself confirms Islam's dynamic force, as its principles are dynamic and were/are able to support society's political life. This is not due to change, but as per its norms and directions. Moreover, at certain times it even reformed existing political systems and transformed the city-state of Medina (and others) into numerous empires and sultanates.

But this dynamism has a drawback, and this drawback is that even over half a century since the Muslim world freed itself from European colonialism, it has failed to produce a "viable and appreciable model of self-governance", for the frequent shifts of regime type – for example, in Pakistan, which oscillates between

democracy and dictatorship – reflects the unsettled nature of its political structures in the Muslim world (Khan, 2005: 42; 2006: xii). But the fact that the Qur'an and Sunnah neither prescribe a particular form of government nor elaborate a constitutional theory also has to be mentioned. As a result, Muslims are free to discover the most suitable form of governance – on the condition that both this governance and the accompanying institutions are in full agreement with the Shari'ah.

In response to the contention that the Muslim world has failed to produce a viable and appreciable governing model, M. A. Muqtedar Khan argues:

Today the Muslim world boasts a diversity of regime types: dictatorships and sham democracies in Egypt, Sudan, and Tunisia; secular democracy in Turkey; monarchies in the Gulf; pluralistic democracies in Bangladesh and Malaysia and an Islamic state in Iran (a sort of theo-democracy) (Khan, 2005: 42; Khan, 2006: 12).

As regards the view that Muslims are free to devise the most suitable form of government, Muhammad Asad, Abdul Rashid Moten, Sayed Khatab, and many other scholars/writers share the same or (almost the same) view. For example, in his, "The Principles of State and Government in Islam", Asad argues:

[T]he Shari`ah does not prescribe any definite pattern [governing model] to which an Islamic state must conform, nor does it elaborate in detail a constitutional theory. The political law emerging from the context of the Qur'an and Sunnah is, nevertheless, not an illusion. It is very vivid and concrete inasmuch as it gives us the clear outline of a political scheme capable of realization at all times and under all conditions of human life. But precisely because it was meant to be realized at all times and under all conditions, that scheme has been offered in outline only and not in detail. Man's political, social, and economic needs are time-bound and, therefore, extremely variable. Being a Divine Ordinance...it leaves a vast field of constitution-making activity, of government methods, and of day-to-day legislation to the Ijtihad of the time concerned (Asad, 1961, 22-23).

Although the Muslim world's debate over democracy, as well as its definitions and fundamentals, has gone for a long time – as

discussed above – it has acquired an edge in recent years, especially since the 1970s. Over the past two decades or so, in fact, it has emerged as a highly influential and debated discourse/issue among various prominent modernist or reformist Muslim scholars/thinkers all over the world, including Europe and America. These people represent a vision of Islam and its role in the human polity, a vision that has attained so much certainty and loudness that it has recently come to dominate the face of Islam.

Huge struggles continue within Islam over various political aspects: their nature, role, significance, relevance, importance, consistency, compatibility, and co-existence. But the most burning issue is the process of democratization itself. In the following pages, the arguments, viewpoints, opinions, observations, and analyses of the four (4) most influential and prominent Muslim modernist thinkers/intellectuals – Sadek J. Sulaiman, Louay M. Safi, Radwan A. Masmoudi, and M.A. Muqtedar Khan – are presented, in order to unfold the issue of democratization and its compatibility and consistency with Islam’s key political concepts of Khilafah (vicegerency) and Shura (consultation), Ijma (consensus) and Ijtihad (independent reasoning). Their views on the compatibility between Islam and democracy are nearly the same and represent significant contributions to this ongoing debate. What is common (in all of them) is that all have/and are greatly developing, defining and establishing an authentic and viable Islamic democracy, utilizing long-standing traditions and conceptualization of Shura, Ijma, and Ijtihad etc.

Sadek Jawad Sulaiman (b. 1933, Oman)

This Omani intellectual, former ambassador to the United States (1979-83), accepts the compatibility of democracy and Shura on the grounds that it, as a concept and a principle, does not differ from democracy. In his *Democracy and Shura*, he very rationally argues that “equality” – the affirmation that all people are equal – is democracy’s core principle. In other words, any discrimination among people on

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any basis (e.g., race, gender, religion, or lineage) is inherently invalid. Democracy, literally “rule by the people”, is based on certain characteristics, among them freedom of speech, press, and assembly; the free exercise of religion; free elections; majority rule and minority rights; separation of the legislature, executive, and judicial branches; constitutional authority (i.e., supremacy of the rule of law); and freedom of action for individuals and groups. These democratic principles, although recognized as universal human principles since ancient times, continue to demand a more complete fulfillment in the experience of all nations (Sulaiman, 1994: 97).

He argues that both democracy and Shura arise from the central belief that collective deliberation, rather than individual preference, is more likely to lead to a fair and sound results for the social good. As principles, both of them proceed from the core idea that all people are equal, in terms of their rights and responsibilities, and affirm that a more comprehensive fulfillment of the principles and values by which humanity prospers cannot be achieved in a non-democratic, non-Shura environment (Sulaiman, 1994: 98). Sadek views the Qura’nic term Shura as neither rejecting nor being incompatible with the basic elements of a democratic system, nor as being a specifically ordained system of governance. Instead, he sees it as a principle governing the Muslims’ public life and holds that the more any system can constitutionally, institutionally, and practically fulfill the principle of Shura or, for that matter, the democratic principle, the more Islamic it becomes (Sulaiman, 1994: 97). Leaving aside the differences in how they are applied, he regards both terms as synonymous in conception and principle on the basis that the logic underlying Shura, like that underlying democracy, rejects hereditary rule because wisdom and competence are never the monopoly of any one individual or family. Both reject government by force (any rule sustained by coercion is illegitimate), as well as any political, social, or economic privileges claimed on the basis of tribal lineage or social prestige (Sulaiman, 1994: 97).

In his view, Shura – in the liberal interpretation – is broad and

binding mutual consultation through which a decision is democratically arrived at, that implies equality of status among citizens, male and female, in the consultative process. In this view, Islam is compatible with democracy (Sulaiman, 2003).¹

In his *The Shura Principle in Islam*, Sulaiman not only regards Shura, along with justice, equality, and human dignity as the four cardinal principles in the Islamic perspective on socio-political organization, but he also considers the ideas of constitutionalism and representative governance as being well rooted within the Islamic socio-political perspective. They have their basis not only in Islam's ethical imperatives of justice, equality, and the dignity of the human being, but also in Islam's well-established legal precepts. He claims that recent Islamic scholarship has tended toward a broader understanding of these precepts and in some cases has in fact offered broader constructions.

For example, since Muhammad Abduh, Rashid Rida and others expounded their reformist ideas in Egypt a century ago, not only has the authenticity of Shura come to be more widely recognized, but the scope of its application has come to be viewed as essentially at par with that of modern democratic systems, incorporating all the main elements thereof, such as people's sovereignty, popular elections, separation of powers with built-in checks and balances, political pluralism, legal opposition, and freedom of speech (Sulaiman).²

For Sulaiman, Islam stipulates "rida al awam" (popular consent) as a prerequisite to the establishment of legitimate political authority, and "ijtihad jama'i" (collective deliberation) as a requisite to the proper administration of public affairs. Beyond that, Islam stipulates "mas'uliyah jama'iyah" (collective responsibility) for maintaining the public good of society. And by affirming all humans as equal before God, Islam stipulates equality before the law. Finally, by rejecting man's subservience to anyone but God, Islam stipulates freedom as the natural state of man; hence liberty within the limits of law is an Islamic stipulation, argues Sulaiman.

Thus, "stressing popular consent, collective deliberation, shared

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responsibility, personal freedom, justice, equality, and dignity of the human individual” – all conceived within the Shura framework of governance – are authentic Islamic positions. Conversely, any thorough and objective reading of Islam would show that by its intrinsically egalitarian perspective, Islam rejects all kinds of autocratic authority or privilege; that it rejects hereditary rule, for no particular lineage has monopoly over competence and integrity (Sulaiman; Italics in original). Democracy and Islam are consistent because Shura and democracy are one and the same concept, a concept that prods us to find better and better realizations of the principles of justice, equality, and human dignity in a collective sociopolitical experience. Thus it seems that Sulaiman is one of the primary proponents of “Shura as democracy.”

Radwan A. Masmoudi (b. 1963, Tunisia):

Dr. Radwan is the Founder and President of the Washington, D.C.-based Center for the Study of Islam & Democracy (CSID, www.islam-democracy.org), a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting freedom, democracy, and good governance in the Arab/Muslim world, and is editor-in-chief of the Centre’s quarterly publication, *The Muslim Democrat*. Masmoudi has written and published – in various journals, like *The Muslim Democrat*, *Journal of Democracy*, and *Future Islam* – several papers on the subject of democracy, diversity, human rights, and tolerance in Islam. But he has been more active in organizing and conducting workshops, conferences, and seminars on Islam and Democracy. For him, over 90% of Muslims and Arabs (who polled in 10 Muslim- majority countries) consider democracy to be the best form of government. There were other polls revealing that over 80% of the people in the Arab world do not want Shari’ah law to govern in their countries. They say they want Islamic values to govern but they don’t want strict implementation of Shari’ah. So there is a struggle for the soul of Islam and it did not start yesterday or after 9/11 but has been ongoing for at

least a century among those calling for modernizing the Muslim world. People in Egypt in particular have been calling for a reinterpretation of Islam for over one hundred years. In an Interview with The Charlotte Observer, Masmoudi says:

We need to reinterpret Islam, but how can we do that in dictatorships where everything is controlled by the state? Democracy is the key because it will give us the opportunity to talk about all these other problems and solve them. It will take time. We need the freedom to talk about what Islam means in the 21st century (Masmoudi, 2006).

In the *Editorial* of the September 1999 issue of *The Muslim Democrat*, Masmoudi writes that “the question of the relationship between the teachings of Islam and the principles of democracy is, undoubtedly, one of the most pressing issues facing the Muslim world today”. The principles of elected rulers, consultative bodies, accountability, tolerance, justice, equality, freedom, human rights and the rule of law are not alien or new to Islam but are embedded in the very primary sources of Islam (Islamic Shari’ah) – the Qur’an and the Sunnah of Prophet (pbuh) (Masmoudi, 1999: 1).

While as, in *Why Democracy?*, Masmoudi – while making a brief review of the conditions of basic freedoms and democracy in the Arab world: freedom of the press, free market economy, freedom of religion, free judicial system, freedom of association, and free elections - concludes that (a) the only way to solve the crisis in the Muslim world is to end tyranny and corruption, and replace them with freedom, equality, and justice, and this is the calling of our generation; (b) democracy is the key to re-opening the door of *Ijtihad* (independent reasoning), that will foster free debate and create an environment that encourages a genuine renewal of Islamic thought; (c) values of freedom and liberty are not only compatible with Islam; they are required by it, for Islam emphasizes that there must be no compulsion in religion, and that faith is a matter of choice; and (d) genuine democracy and an honest, inclusive debate about Islam’s role in society are the only ways to resolve the long simmering problems that threaten peace and stability throughout the Muslim world (Masmoudi,

2005: 1-2).

There are two basic political principles that are heavily emphasized in the Qur'an: 'adl (justice) and Shura (consultation). The problem, says Masmoudi, is that there are no clear institutions or methods that are identified on how this consultation should take place. Muslims have failed in interpreting this message and in applying the idea of Shura, he argues.

In an essay, *The Silenced Majority* (which originally appeared in the April 2003 issue of the *Journal of Democracy*) Masmoudi regards liberty (*hurriya*), Justice ('adl), consultation (*Shura*), and rational interpretation (*Ijtihad*) as the main pillars of "Islamic Liberalism" - which places explicit emphasis on limited governance, individual liberty, human dignity, and human rights (Masmoudi, 2003: 258-259). Liberal Islam - a branch, or a school, of Islam (according to Masmoudi) that emphasizes human liberty and freedom within Islam - should be allowed to grow, which (for Masmoudi) means radically expanding freedom of the press, thought, and freedom to form independent organizations. This is the essence of democracy, claims Masmoudi (Masmoudi, 2003, 260).

He believes that democracy is the only form of government that is compatible with Islam; the alternative is dictatorship, and that is definitely against Islam. He even goes further to argue that democracy is the only solution to the current crisis in the Muslim World. In a paper on the Future of "Islamic Democracy" in the Middle East (published by *Future Islam* in 2007), he claims that democracy in the Arab world and in the foreseeable future will have a more or less "Islamic flavor", but this is normal, natural, and in the long run, a healthy development which will ultimately lead to the modernization and reinterpretation of Islamic principles for the 21st century; and he draws the following main conclusions:

(a) Democracy is the only solution to (and only way out from) the current crisis in the Muslim World, and particularly in the Arab world;

(b) Democracy is perfectly compatible with Islam;

(c) Democracy cannot and should not exclude the moderate Islamic movements (i.e. those that reject violence); and

(d) The role of the US and the West is critical for the success of democracy (Masmoudi, 2007).

Louay M. Safi (born in Damascus):

Dr. Safi is a Syrian-American scholar of Islam and the Middle East, and an advocate of Arab and Muslim American rights, the executive director of the Islamic Society of North America's Leadership Development Center (ILDC), Plainfield, Indiana. Author of 11 books – including *Tensions and Transitions in the Muslim World* (University Press of America: 2003) and *Peace and the Limits of War* (IIIT: 2001), *Blaming Islam: Examining the Religion Building Enterprise* (ISPU:2006), *The Foundation of Knowledge* (IIUM: 1996), *Truth and Reform* (The Open Press, 1998), *The Challenge of Modernity* (University Press of America, 1994) and numerous papers, he writes mainly on social and political development, modernization, democracy, human rights, and Islam and the Middle East. He is a speaker on such questions – as leadership, democracy, Islam and the Middle East – as well. Besides this, he maintains his own website also (www.louaysafi.com). He has also participated in numerous international forums and conferences, and contributed articles to various academic journals, including the *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences*, *Islamic Studies*, *Intellectual Discourse*, *Middle East Affairs Journal*, *Journal of Middle Eastern and South Asian Studies*, and various others. Besides this, he has appeared on numerous radio and TV programs, including CNN, BBC, Monte Carlo, Fox News, PBS, Middle East TV (MBC), Al-Jazeera TV, Voice of America, Malaysian Television, and others.³

Safi advocates reform of Islamic thought, culture, and law by appealing to the universal Islamic values. He supports democratic reform in Muslim countries, rejects interpretations of Islamic sources that instigate interreligious hostility, calls for the development of more inclusive societies in the Muslim world, and has frequently defended

the fledgling Muslim American community against attacks from the far right.

Safi believes that democracy as a system of self governance, accountability of holders of public office, and the rule of law is fully compatible with Islam. Islam is essential for the transformation of Muslim societies from autocratic rule to democracy. A cultural change is required for any democratic reform, and such a change, he insists, is impossible without appealing to more fundamental values. This is where Islam comes in. As it is difficult to imagine the modern West without the Religious Reformation in Europe, it is also difficult to expect democratic reform in the Middle East without Islam being a big part of that. Turkey can probably give us some clues as how a positive Islamic reform can bring about true democracy without resorting to violence.

Safi further argues that micro-managing the reform process is counterproductive, and is likely to play into the hands of antidemocratic forces intent on stemming out the fledgling democratic forces under the rubric of safeguarding national independence and countering foreign interference. He, therefore, proposes that rather than pressuring autocratic government to change school curricula and superimpose a set of abstract criteria through state apparatus, the US government should use its influence to increase the margin of freedom for political expression and action by civil society organizations. In another interview with Q-News, *The Muslim Magazine* (in 2005), Safi claimed that the forces of reform and modernization are already at work in Muslim societies, and have, despite severe limitations imposed by the state on their actions, made considerable strides to affect educational, cultural, and political reforms (Safi, 2005, 17)

In another interview with *National Geographic News*, Louay Safi – who is also a member of the board of directors of the Washington, D.C.-based Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy (CSID) and has spent a lot of time thinking about the pairing of Islam and democratic forms of government – argued that Islam as a set of norms and ideals that emphasizes the equality of people, the accountability

of leaders to community, and the respect of diversity and other faiths, is fully compatible with democracy, saying that “I don’t see how it could be compatible with a government that would take away those values”. Some of the people who say that democracy has no place in Islam, what they really express, says Safi, is a sense that the word “democracy” as presented in international discourse appears to be wholly owned by the West. The word itself has, for some, a connotation of cultural imperialism. “If you talk about representative government”, he further argues, “without the baggage of these institutions in the US, but on more idealistic grounds, then it makes perfectly good sense to a lot of Muslims. The idea of citizenry participating in government is, particularly within Sunni Islam, sort of a bedrock theory” (Safi, 2003).

In modern times, however, the Islamic world has not been particularly fertile ground for the seeds of democracy. If it is to become such, Safi argues that changes must come from within Muslim societies. He says:

I don’t see democracy built without ordinary people working for that. It can’t be imposed from the top down or from the outside. Definitely outsiders can help. They can apply pressure on dictatorial or authoritarian regimes as we did for example in South Africa, where outside help was essential in fostering a more democratic regime. But I think we have to keep in mind we can’t push democracy down the throat of anyone. If we do that it becomes a hated concept. Nobody wants to be forced to be a democrat-that’s a contradiction in terms (Safi, 2003; italics emphasized/added).

If such change is to begin, Safi believes, it can only happen through Islam; making the faith not only compatible but essential for the democratization of Muslim societies.

Across the Muslim world, governments have adopted varying degrees of self-representation in response to unique historical circumstances. Turkey is a parliamentary, secular democracy. Indonesia is one of the world’s largest republics; Iran is a theocratic republic (a sort of theo-democracy) with a growing democratic reform movement. Its proof there is no one-size-fits-all democracy any more

than there is a single interpretation of Islam:

Ultimately democracy could evolve a bit differently in different cultures. It doesn't have to be a replica of the democracy we have in the US You can't compare what we've achieved here as a society over two centuries with an emerging democracy, where people are just trying to test the boundaries and find out what democracy means (Safi, 2003; italics emphasized/added).

The concept of consensus can provide an effective basis for accepting majority rule, as Safi notes, the "legitimacy of the state . . . depends upon the extent to which state organization and power reflect the will of the Ummah [the Muslim community], for as classical jurists have insisted, the legitimacy of state institutions is not derived from textual sources but is based primarily on the principle of ijma" (Safi, 1991, 233).

In *Shura and Democracy: Similarities and Differences*,⁴ Safi states that democracy and Shura share the ideal of egalitarian politics and popular political participation, but differ significantly in relating participatory government to the overall purposes of social organization and political action, but at the same time makes clear the fact that the ideal of democracy has been expressed in various forms, and is being implemented today through different models. It is therefore quite appropriate, argues Safi, for one to speak of Shura as a framework for an Islamic democracy, and draws the following conclusions:

Democracy and Shura share the common aspiration of overcoming political elitism and preventing the control by a select few of the lives of the multitude;

Both encounter similar challenges, including a vulnerability to various formulations and interpretations;

Democracy and Shura diverge on three grounds, namely the way the two participatory systems conceive of political organization, freedom, and law;

Democracy is at bottom a system whose intent is to open the political process to popular participation, Shura is indeed a democratic

system; and the principle of popular political participation is bound to undergo significant transformation in its mode of application when embraced by peoples who subscribe to an Islamic worldview (Safi, 1999).

M.A. Muqtedar Khan (b. 1966, Hyderabad, India)

Dr. Muqtedar is an associate professor in the Department of Political Science and International Relations at the University of Delaware. He is also the founding Director of the Islamic Studies Program at the University of Delaware – earned his Ph.D. in international relations, political philosophy, and Islamic political thought, from Georgetown University in May 2000.

A well known Muslim intellectual, whose articles and columns are widely published, he advocates freedom of thought and independent thinking, and he states that it is the inability of Muslims to sustain a dialogue with time and text that sometimes makes Islamic teachings look anachronistic or even intolerant.

Khan is admired for advancing a more moderate and liberal vision of Islam. He claims to be critical of radicalism and narrow conservatism within Islamic thought and also critical of Western foreign policies, racism and Islamophobia in the US and the West. Khan is regarded as one of the “rising stars among Muslim intellectuals” in the West (*The Daily Star*), “Voice of Moderate Islam” (*Los Angeles Times* and *The Boston Globe*), “A Rare Moderate Voice” (*The Daily Times*), a scholar who brings “passion, eloquence and intellectual power to bear on his subject” (Dr. Ali Mazrui). John L. Esposito, in his scholarly acclaim writes that Muqtedar Khan's intelligent, reasoned, self-critical, impassioned, and provocative Muslim voice makes a distinctive and significant contribution to the process of reexamination and reform.

Author of *American Muslims: Bridging Faith and Freedom* (Amana, 2002), *Jihad for Jerusalem: Identity and Strategy in International Relations* (Praeger, 2004), Muqtedar Khan has written extensively on the

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Islam-democracy compatibility theme: *Islam's Compatibility with Democracy; Shura and Democracy; The Compact of Medina: A Constitutional Theory of the Islamic State, etc*; he has also edited books on this theme: *Islamic Democratic Discourse: Theory, Debates and Philosophical Perspectives*, and *Debating Moderate Islam. Islamic Democracy and Moderate Muslims: The Straight Path runs through the Middle* in the Special Issue on *Debating Moderate Islam* of AJISS 27:2 Summer 2005 (and was Guest Editor of the same). He maintains the websites that archive his short articles on *Islam and Global Affairs* respectively: www.ijtihad.org and www.Glocaleye.org.

In considering the compatibility of Islam and democracy, Khan noted, one must recognize that it is false to claim that there is no democracy in the Muslim world. At least 750 million Muslims live in democratic societies of one kind or another, including Indonesia, Bangladesh, India, Europe, North America, Israel, and even Iran. Moreover, there is little historical precedent for mullahs controlling political power. One exception is Iran since the revolution in 1979 and the other is the Taliban in Afghanistan. For the preceding 1500 years since the advent of Islam, secular political elites have controlled political power (Khan, 2002: 3).

Muslim scholars agree that the principle of Shura is the source of democratic ethics in Islam. While there is considerable truth in this claim, one must also recognize the differences between Shura and democracy before one can advance an Islamic conception of democracy based on Shura. Shura is basically a consultative decision-making process that is considered either obligatory or desirable by different scholars. Those who choose to emphasize the Qura'nic verse "and consult with them on the matter" (3:159) consider Shura as obligatory, but those who emphasize the verse praising "those who conduct their affairs by counsel" (43:38) consider Shura as merely desirable. There is no doubt that Shura is the Islamic way of making decisions, but is it obligatory? Does a government that does not implement a consultative process become illegitimate? We do not have decisive answers to such questions (Khan, 2002: 4).

In his article, *Islam's Compatibility with Democracy*, Khan argues that democracy with its principles of limited government, public accountability, checks and balances, separation of powers and transparency in governance does succeed in limiting man's sovereignty. The Muslim world plagued by despots, dictators and self-regarding monarchs badly needs the limitation of man's sovereignty. The democratic ideal is quite widely upheld in the Muslim world. Even prominent "Islamic revivalists of the twentieth century like Maulana Maududi and Imam Khomeini" have advocated the cause of democracy. Maulana Maududi was the first to write about the concept of a Theo democracy - a God centered democratic polity. And Imam Khomeini established separation of powers, a parliament, elections and public accountability along with the institution of Vilayat-e-faqi after the Islamic revolution of Iran. Indeed there is nothing in Islam and in Muslim practices that is "fundamentally opposed to democracy - justice, freedom, fairness, equality or tolerance" (Khan, 2001).

In another article *Shura and Democracy*, Khan makes some differences between the two. For him Shura and democracy differ in three basic ways: firstly, unlike Shura, democracy allows "modification" of foundational texts; constitution can be amended but not the Qur'an or the Sunnah. Secondly, Shura remains non-binding while democratic process and laws are binding and can only be reversed through a democratic process and not by unilateral and oligopolistic processes. Finally, the way Shura is discussed in Islamic discourses is something that the leader/ruler initiates and is expected to practice. Shura is the "leader consulting" some people, whereas in a democracy it is "people-consulting among themselves" about who will govern and how. "Notice how Shura is top-down and democracy bottom-up", concludes Muqtedar Khan (Khan, 1999: 5).

But at the same time he claims that Shura like democracy is a deeply contested notion; it is the successful and just practice and institutionalization of these ideas that counts rather than theoretical finessing.

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Furthermore, in *Islamic Democratic Discourse: Theory, Debates and Philosophical Perspectives* - a book he edited that brings forth the analysis of the democratic discourse in Islam in legal, historical and philosophical aspects as well as on regional and global level and highlights its vitality in intellectual and civilizational setup of the Muslim Ummah - he attempts to accelerate the development of the gradually emerging philosophical and theological discourse on Islamic democratic theory. Making a systematic effort to link contemporary Muslim ideas on Islam and democracy with classical Islamic theories and profound theological concepts and issues, it opens new avenues to seriously build authentic Islamic theory/theories of democracy. He examines how Muslim thinkers have tried to formulate systems for good and ethical self-governance and the necessity, therein, for political discourse. In his own chapter, *The Politics, Theory and Philosophy of Islamic Democracy*, Khan discusses in detail the Politics - Islamic as well as Western - behind the discourse of Islam and democracy, emphasizing that the discourse is composed of two distinct debates: one debate is primarily "political" - and the central question that is debated is the reasons for the marked absence of democracies in the Muslim world - and the second debate is "Quasi -theological, or in a sense concerns the political theology of Islam" - and this debate is about the compatibility of Islam and democracy (Khan, 2006, 151). In general, it explores the politics that underpins the theoretical discourse on Islam and democracy and then proceeds to evaluate the relative merits of philosophy, theology and jurisprudence in developing an authentic Islamic discourse on democracy. While making discussion on the prospects of an Islamic democratic theory in the context of three genres of discourse - theological, jurisprudential, and philosophical - he comes to the conclusions that "while theological understanding is necessary but not sufficient, philosophical illumination is the answer but needs much more development and jurisprudence is a challenge rather than an ally of Islamic democratic theory" (Khan, 2006: 166). He also makes the following observations regarding the establishment of Islamic

democratic theory, which for him, first should become an aspiration in Muslim minds and must dominate their discourse:

The barriers to democracy in the Muslim world are both ideational and material. While political activism and even revolutionary change may become necessary to establish democracy, Islamic democratic theory must precede political change in order to remove ideational barriers first. If an authentic Islamic democracy is to emerge, then it must first become an aspiration in Muslim minds and must dominate their discourse. Once the idea exists, the form can follow. This is the challenge for Islamic political theory (Khan, 2006: 166; italic emphasized/added).

There is much in Islamic sources and Islamic tradition that is favorable to making democracy the vehicle for delivering the products of Islamic governance, such as social justice, economic welfare, and religious freedoms. The barriers to democracy in the Muslim world, in Khan's view, are not limited to narrow interpretations of Islam or fascist tendencies of some of the contemporary Islamic movements, but the existing "social-political conditions, failure of states, and the negative role of foreign powers" have also contributed to an environment that does not encourage democracy. These barriers are both "ideational and material". Khan argues by way of conclusion – an argument that he replicates in several of his writings – that Islam is "not a barrier to but a facilitator of democracy, justice and tolerance" in the Muslim world. For him, if an "authentic Islamic democracy" is to emerge, then it must first become an inspiration in Muslim minds and must dominate their discourse. "Once the idea exists, the form can follow" (Khan, 2006: 166; 2008: 37-38; and 2009: 25).

Conclusion

The foregoing assessment – of these (4) most influential and prominent (living) Muslim reformist/modernist thinkers: Sadek J. Sulaiman, Louay M. Safi, Radwan A. Masmoudi, and M.A. Muqtedar Khan – reveals that the Muslim thinkers from East and West, from North Africa to South Asia, from Europe and America to the Middle

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East, are engaged in a quest to develop an Islamic program of democracy based on those Islamic norms and ideals that emphasize the equality of people, the accountability of leaders to community, and the respect of diversity and other faiths, in a phrase those ideals that are fully compatible with (modern) democracy. They agree that the principle of Shura – mutual consultation or consultative decision-making process based on two Qura’nic verses (3:159 & 42:38) – is the source of democratic ethics in Islam; and the concept of majority and the utilitarian aspect of the Western system are somewhat similar to Islamic principles of Ijma (consensus) and al-maslahah (public interest). As across the Muslim world, several regime types – sham democracies in Egypt, Sudan, and Tunisia before the revolution; secular democracy in Turkey; pluralistic democracies in Bangladesh and Malaysia; and an Islamic state in Iran (a sort of theo-democracy) – exist, and as 750 million Muslims live in these and other democratic societies of one kind or another (like India, Europe, North America, Israel, besides above mentioned Muslim countries). Thus, there is misconception and misunderstanding of those scholars who deny Islam-democracy compatibility. Furthermore, it is equally questionable to claim that there are more differences/contradictions between the two systems of political thought. No doubt, there are some basic differences between the two systems of political thought, but in comparison to the similarities, they are negligible, and to repeat (once again) the phrase (as mentioned elsewhere above) that what Islam and the West share is vast and profound in comparison to what separates them. Furthermore, these intellectuals favoring Islam-democracy compatibility a lot to achieve modernity and development but also to ensure better practice of Islam and good governance.

Lastly, the author contends and asserts that a more reflection and research, and (re) interpretation is required to reconcile the tenets of Islam with the modern notions of democracy, liberty, justice, equality, and human rights as the Islamic primary sources – the Holy Qur’an and the Sunnah – throw ample light and guidance on these concepts

and values. Furthermore, we see clearly that the most widely accepted way to increase the people's participation in government, from the final decades of last century and in this century, is the demand and desire for democracy, and while utilizing and reinterpreting several important concepts and values from within the Islamic heritage, modernist Muslims intellectuals are trying to lay the foundations of a political order that harmonizes Islamic principles with a democratic system of government. Finally this endeavor – Islam and democracy compatibility discourse – is not anti-Western but is a sincere move towards expanding the concerns of humanitarianism, justice, and peace on genuine and reasonable grounds.

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