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## Caliphate ideology

Abdel-Moneim Said

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In general, fascist ideologies depend primarily on two basic elements. The first is the deintellectualisation of people, which entails voiding the human intellect of everything to do with rationality and the comprehension of causal relations and evolutionary and revolutionary transformations and then filling that void with a rudimentary logic informed by behavioural instincts and programmed so as to render people blindly obedient to a group of proselytisers who lay claim to some form of magnificence. Peoples from the warriors of ancient Sparta to the followers of the 20th century fascists, communists, socialists and Nazis offer examples of this reduced mental state. In our contemporary times, the “believers” in all they are told by Al-Qaeda, Daesh (IS, the Islamic State group) and the Muslim Brotherhood before that also fall into this category.

The second element is the grand idea. Often imperialist in nature, it promises the revival of an ancient glory or the advent of one to come. The idea tends to carry a notion of ineluctable destiny. When “secularist”, such as fascism, Nazism and communism, it takes the form of a logical imperative; when “religious” it is “divinely” ordained, which is what all terrorist groups claim. Fascist ideologies have given birth to such grand ideas as the revival of the Roman Empire, the Third Reich, the Communist International and the IS “Caliphate”. The latter is another irredentist ideology: it seeks to reinstate the historical Islamic Caliphate so as to revive

ancient glories. It comes with the promise of paradise for the jihadists who fight for this cause and the promise of destruction of cities and entire countries if necessary.

Ideology is thus central to terrorist thought. Accordingly, if the war against terrorism is not just a military/security battle but also a war for hearts and minds, the renovation of religious thought is of the greatest urgency and it is essential to apply some innovative thought in this regard.

There are two aspects to this question. One is religious/historical and has to do with the evolution of the state in the Islamic world from its emergence in the holy cities of Mecca and Medina to the rise of the caliphate and its passage through its various Umayyad, Abbasid and Ottoman eras. While all those eras had their own distinct characteristics, in historical context they all shared the quality of being vast empires to which applied the laws of rise and fall and strength and decay that have applied to all the world's empires. The second aspect has to do with the modern Arab Muslim state and how its principles and modes of government and administration accommodated to the major international changes since the fall of the Ottoman Empire after the end of World War I. In both aspects, the idea of the "caliphate" has retained a symbolic power that kings and intellectuals sometimes tried to revive and, more importantly here, that has become today a means to attract and recruit terrorist elements to defend the so-called caliphate with its fluctuating borders in Syria and Iraq.

The first facet, above, demands intellectual efforts on the part of theologians and other specialists. It should be noted in this regard that a major debate has been in progress over the question of the caliphate since the end of the Ottoman Caliphate in 1924. But the second facet demands an even greater effort, not only because it is the central complex of political life in the contemporary Arab state but also because it is the crux of the current conflict between the state and terrorism. While other factors are involved in this question, for purposes of analysis we need to isolate this element so as to render it clearer and more distinct. Accordingly, there are a number of facts that need to be borne in mind.

Firstly, although the Ottoman Caliphate lasted more than four centuries, from the beginning of the 15th century until its final collapse in the early 20th century, that empire actually began its demise at the end of its second century of existence, since which time it suffered the processes of erosion, decay and decline until it became what was metaphorically known as the "Sick Man of Europe".

Secondly, in spite of its extensive breadth in the Islamic world, the Ottoman state did not succeed in defending Muslim peoples. In fact, it was no different in form or substance to all other colonialist empires in its squandering of vast resources, on top of which it permitted foreign penetration of the territories of the caliphate and its subsidiary entities.

Thirdly, imperialism or the notion of an imperial entity is no longer acceptable in today's world. The end of World War I not only brought the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, but also the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The aftermath of World War II (and the Suez War in 1956) heralded the end of the French and British empires, and the end of the Italian dream to revive the Mediterranean as the Roman imperial sea. Then, the end of the Cold War ushered in

the collapse of the Soviet Union together with the collapse of some conglomerate states such as Yugoslavia.

Fourthly, the Arab state did not arise solely as the product of outside influences, whether international or colonialist. Indeed, it was primarily the product of a domestic will that was shaped by alliances between various domestic social forces that found in the concept of the state an umbrella and a shield to promote and protect the collective interests and wills that sought to realise a central authority. In fact, apart from in the Fertile Crescent region, the part that foreign powers had to play in the formation of the modern Arab state was small if not marginal. Generally, it was limited to generating the types of socio-political fusion that arose in the course of anti-colonialist resistance. This phenomenon was particularly powerful in North African countries and in the countries of the Arabian Peninsula. But even in the Levant and the area once known as Greater Syria, which experienced a blend of colonialist promises and pacts, the states that arose were anchored in ancient Arab capitals, such as Baghdad and Damascus.

Fifthly, the modern Islamic Arab state was borne in the crucible of the conflict against colonialism or it emerged from a process of unification beneath a historical leadership, as was the case with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. While Islam remained a basic component of the “identity” of those states, “modernism” eventually began to lend the state a contemporary spirit that interacts with a unified market, a technology that transmits values and traditions, and a clearer and more open view of the “other” in today’s world. The fierce conflict that is raging in this region, whether against Daesh fundamentalism in Iraq, Syria, Egypt and North Africa, or against the other, Iranian, fundamentalism in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Yemen, may well be a test of the Arab nation state from which this state may emerge stronger and firmer.

Certainly, there is much more involved in this question and the door is open to more input theologically and factually; however, we must bear in mind that the current conflict, which extends over such a vast geographical expanse, will remain with us for a period of time that is impossible to calculate at present. Since this is the case, an important part of the current process of resistance will still need to rely on various sources of strength, be they economic or military, as well as on the political art of building coalitions and interacting with regional and international stakeholders in the conflict while taking these stakeholders’ other particular interests into account.

Nevertheless, the ideological facet of the battle remains extremely crucial not just for the purpose of preventing terrorist recruitment processes that are taking place in Arab countries and elsewhere in the world, but also to erode the ground that terrorist organisations acquired in Arab countries and societies. As for how to go about this, that is the question.