Islamic Model of Political Leadership as a Potential Way to Start Negotiations Aimed at Resolving the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict[*][•]

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Abstract

The paper reviews the issue of the creation of a fundamentally new innovative model of negotiation process focused on settling the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In the author's opinion, political leadership factor that is typical for the Arab-Israeli world is instrumental in providing a conceptual framework for peace talks between Israel and Palestine in the context of globalization. The article focuses on the peculiarities of the Islamic model of political or, to be more precise, religious and political leadership and how it can be implemented to give a new impetus to the currently bogged down Israeli-Palestinian peace talks. The author argues that is impossible to achieve any tangible regional treaty because not all the arrangements concerning Palestine have a legitimate character from the point of view of both the Palestinians and the people of other Muslim countries in the world. Therefore, in the author's opinion, without using such an innovative model of the negotiation process it will be principally impossible to achieve a final settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Keywords: Political culture, Islamic model of political leadership, The Arab-Israeli conflict, The Palestinian problem, Negotiation process.

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Introduction

At the end of the 1980's – at the beginning of the 2000's there were several attempts to give an impetus to the negotiation process aimed at resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict. One of the main results of this process implemented through the mediation of the USA was signing of the joint Declaration of Principles dated September 13, 1993 in the course of bilateral closed negotiations held in Oslo between Israel represented by its Minister of Foreign Affairs, Shimon Peres, and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) represented by Mahmoud Abbas (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1993). Later in 2000 within the framework of Camp David negotiations regarding the final settlement of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict it turned out to be evident that despite actions taken to resolve the conflict the main points of the agreements signed by the parties are not implemented in a proper way and the cold spell in the Palestinian-Israeli relations is still present; thus at this moment the Middle East standoff is unsettled (Balashov et al., 2003).

Such a situation in Palestinian-Israeli relations can be explained by a wide range of reasons.

Firstly, geopolitically the Middle East considered to be one of the most important communication and raw materials centers of global importance. This tumultuous region produces today 37 percent of the world's oil and 18 percent of its gas, whereas the five countries with the greatest proven reserves as well are all in the Middle East (Luft, 2009).

Secondly, holy places of three world religions (Christianity, Judaism and Islam) are situated in this territory. The most litigious issue of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which has often derailed peace negotiations, is the future of Jerusalem since all three monotheistic faiths have profound ties to this ancient city. The mention of Jerusalem in the Qur'an under the name of the al-Masjid-al-Aqsa made the whole city a holy place for Muslims. For Jews, in turn, Jerusalem is a symbol of a nation and the site of important sanctuaries and holy places, such as the Temple Mount, the Wailing Wall, the Mount of Olives and Mount Zion. Finally, Christian places of worship include the Basilica of the Holy Sepulcher, the Gardens of Gethsemane, the Via Dolorosa and the Stations of the Cross.

Thirdly, control over the Middle East is an obligatory condition to build up the unipolar world order. So it is clear that leading world powers actively interfere in the developments in the region; first of all it is referred to the USA that takes an active part in the Middle East events and is eager to create such an international relations system, as well as to the European Union, Russia and China for which the Middle East region with the exceptional number of natural resources is also strategically important (Hansen, 2001).

Fourthly, such Middle East states as Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Iran and Saudi Arabia have their own interests relating to the issue and seek to dominate in the region.

Fifthly, foreign policy objectives of Israel and the Palestinian National Authority that as state formations also try to ensure the implementation of their national interests and provide safety in the region.

So, these different factors do not provide an opportunity to resolve the Middle East conflict and iron out differences in the relations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority.

However, there is one more issue that caused failures of attempts to find the way out of the Arab-Israeli conflict and reach compromise among Israel, Palestine and other concerned states-members of this negotiation process.

Up to the present, all political dialogues regarding the Palestinian problem have been carried out at the level of political and state officials. Unfortunately, such a form of negotiations did not lead to a positive result. In our opinion, one of the main reasons for such failures is the fact that western partners and leaders of Israel do not take into account the specific nature of political leadership model that is typical for the Palestinian Authority and for other countries of the Arab-Islamic world involved in the Palestinian events. Traditionally one of the key fundamentals of national status and political culture in countries of the Arab-Islamic world is the Islamic community – Ummah. Its essential role in life is given by norms of corporate ethics and traditions historically. The ideal within such a behavior system is a paternalistic model so that the political process turns out to be the implementation and support of immanent, natural, long-standing and approved principles.

Besides this, Islamic states are based on the idea of "holy justice" in other words national status is messianic and freedom is not individual but collective – according to Prophet Muhammad, leadership in Islam is not reserved for a small elite. Rather, depending upon the situation, every person is the "shepherd" of a flock, and occupies a position of leadership (Beekun& Badawi, 1999). Additionally, the Arab-Islamic communities are based on theocratic principles in accordance with which the state has not only power and managing responsibilities but also it is a symbol, personification, bearer of Islamic important moral and religious criteria and it is eager to control all social practices. That is why political power in such an Islamic state and community can be limited not only by central authorities but also by spiritual ones. They believe in sacral nature of all earth space and in the need of implementation of collegiality principle in other words in the organization of temporal society in accordance with the principles of the religious community (Voskresensky, 2007).

So in accordance with Islamic political and cultural tradition the historically developed character of political culture and, first of all, its religious component that is closely connecting the fundamentals of the Islamic religion to organization of political process in a state as well as the ways of social and political interactions and directly influences the process of forming the specific nature of state and political leadership.

In other words, the main specific feature of the political culture in Islamic states in relation to genuine power is an actual confluence of political administration and religious power, temporal and spiritual issues. On the one hand this fact promoted the absolutization of religious authority and, on the other hand, the decrease in value of administrative and bureaucratic hierarchy (Rogozhina, 2011).

At the same time, an Islamic community able to stand against the state has never existed neither in the Caliphate nor in any other Islamic state. However, this does not mean that the interests of the Muslim clergy have never come into contradiction with the policy of administrative authorities of the country.

Nevertheless, nowadays there are two basic concepts of political leadership within typical political culture of the Arab-Islamic world. One of such models is connected with religious traditions of the Sunnism, the other one is based on the Shiism.

Thus, according to the Sunnis the Imam does not have to be a descendant of Prophet Muhammed, however he is simultaneously considered to be his successor, religious leader and the head of the Islamic community (Ummah); in other words, the Imam performs a wide range of functions of the supreme spiritual and temporal powers and acts as the temporal and spiritual leader, who is traditionally selected on the basis of communal consensus, on the existing political order, and on a leader's individual merits.

Nevertheless, Sunnism has always fostered another idea of a religious leader. This concept implicates theologians and legal experts called Ulemas who, (similar to Shiism), make decisions on religious, political and judicial issues (Hellyer & Brown, 2015). The spiritual title of the Sunni theologians and legal experts is the Sheikhu'l-Islam, in some Muslim countries – Mufti (for example in Turkey such a person is supposed to have a right to take decisions relating to religious and judicial issues and is called as Mufti).

Hence, according to the Sunni tradition political leadership as a phenomenon is a question of greater importance than the Shiite one. Though there are some different thoughts, in accordance with the mainstream Sunni idea the temporal stakeholders have higher positions within various hierarchical power structures than the Shiite ones. In this respect, according to

the Sunni tradition a political leader is the holder of authority and at the same time is the bearer of religious traditions; such a person is supposed to be the spiritual leader. The extreme example of such power relations structure is the functioning of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and theHashemite Kingdom of Jordan where the head of state serves simultaneously as the descendant of Prophet Muhammed and as his successor, the faithful leader and the head of the Islamic Ummah.

Additionally, the majority of Shiites believe that the holiness of Muhammad is equally important as the holiness of Ali whose authority has been based on his kinship to the Prophet and on his personal traits; thanks to these traits the hereditary grace fallen to the descendants of Muhammad and Ali became even more meaningful and irrefutable. That is exactly why in order to justify the holiness of not only Muhammad but also the holiness of Ali and his descendants.

Shiites pay special attention to the Hadiths – legendaries on Muhammad that are in the Shiites tradition referred to as "Ahbar" (messages) – that contain information on the family of the Prophet, his conversations with Ali etc. (Yeremeev, 1990).

Thus, the descendants of Muhammad and Ali should personify both the temporal and spiritual authorities. According to French Islamic scholar Henri Masse "the Shiites have created a kind of "related" apology in the Islam and turned out to be Muslim legitimists" (Masse, 1963: 8).

Based on the monarchical idea of legitimacy the Shiites have also turned the doctrine of Imamate – supreme spiritual authority i.e the doctrine specifying who has the right to be the head of the Islamic Ummah – into one of the principles of the state law.

The Shiites reject the institution of Caliphate. Also, they do not acknowledge the term "Caliph", more precisely they do not acknowledge "Caliphate Rasul al-Allah" – "successor (alternate) of messenger of Allah". They reject another name of the head of the Ummah – "Amir ul-Muminin" – "Lord of the faithful" – with reference to the Caliphs (Yeremeev, 1990).

Based on this emanation and legitimist concept of supreme power the Shiites added the dogma of the Imamate to the Sunnis "pillars" of religion; in accordance with this dogma the head of an Islamic state can only be descendants of Prophet Muhammad and Ali (Sarmazdeh, 2015). Initially, this concept was created to legally justify the rights of Ali and his posterity to rule. Then it turned into one of the key dogma according to which the Imamate was "establishment of Allah" and it could not depend on the will and desires of people; in other

words, it cannot be elected as in theory it has been acknowledged by the Sunnis and implemented in practice during the election of the first Caliphs.

Throughout history, the main feature of the organizational structure of the Shiites religious community was determined. Its sense was connected with the huge role of the spiritual leader of the community who was considered to be the "voice of the hidden Imam"; this led to a sharp exaltation of the status of the Shiites Ulemas in comparison with the Sunnis ones (Razekh, 2015).

From the Shiites point of view, the power as the grace of God, or sacred emanation, is mysteriously passed from one Imam to another one, totally – 12 times (not in all shiite sects, but among twelvershiites that are most wide-spread); it is the number of revered Imams; according to legendary the last of Imams, Muhammad al-Mahdi, has disappeared in a cave near Samarra in Iraq. According to the Shiites, this Imam is "hidden" or in other words he is called "hidden Imam" who is invisibly present in this world and must appear as the Mahdi (Messiah) to revive the world's true faith, the Shiism (Rogozhina, 2013).

Pretending to the right to be a "weapon of the hidden Imam" the Shiites Ulemas and the most revered of them - the Mujtahids, possessing the authority of knowledge, piety and godliness, sometimes became authentic leaders whose influence eclipsed political administration. This situation that is almost unknown to the Sunnis Islam have repeatedly occurred, for example, in the Shiite Iran in the XXth century when attempts of implementing reforms caused the resistance and led to a sharp rise of religious and political activity of the Ulamas and Mujtahids. The most notable among them are those whose knowledge, piety and authority allowed them to obtain a unique position, acquired the right to receive the honorary title of "Ayatollah" – "sign of Allah". Several Ayatollahs in Iran have the title "Ayatullah al-Uzma" – "the Greatest Ayatollah". The head of Iran's Shiites clergy is called in Arabic "Marja at-taqlid" – "role model" (Yeremeev, 1990). Imam Khomeini was the owner of this title in pre-revolutionary Iran.

In the late 1970's the possession of this title allowed Khomeini and the clergy of Iran basing on the "divine nature" of the power of the Imam to legitimately assume the role of intermediaries between the "hidden Imam" and the faithful. They set the temporal rule of the Shah against the so-called "Islamic rule" (Hukumat ul-Islamiya) which, in the opinion of Khomeini and his followers, was a performance of "commandments of Allah" (Amrullah) where the only ruler and legislator was Allah himself.

The leading positions of Shiite clerics in political life of the country are also reflected in the state system of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The existence of democratic electoral bodies (the Parliament (the Majlis) and the President) are combined with the elements of the Islamic theocracy advancing the real political power to the hands of a small group of Muslim clerics. All decisions taken by the President or Parliament cannot enter into force without the approval of the Rahbar (spiritual head of state) or Supervisory Board (Voskresensky, 2007). In its turn, the title of the head of the Shiites clergy – "Marja at-taqlid" – was introduced in the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and Khomeini had this title.

Thus, the basic principle of the leadership, according to the Shiites tradition, is the fact that only "hidden Imam" who is invisibly present in this world and must appear as the Mahdi (Messiah) possesses full political and religious authority over the Islamic Ummah (Lust, 2013). While the "hidden Imam" is absent, the Islamic Ummah must be headed by religious leaders – the Mujtahids and Ayatollahs who serve as the "hidden Imam"; this fact provides them with the right to make decisions of a legal and political nature in their personal discretion. It should be also highlighted that the Islamic Ummah plays the main role in making various decisions because it is stated in a hadith that the power can be received only "from God".

Consequently, in accordance with the Shiites doctrine, the concept "political leader" does not exist. The Shiites put in the first place the concept of religious leadership because they believe that only a religious leader can act as a political leader, because this person is the "voice of the hidden Imam". The leader must possess great moral traits entirely relevant to Islamic traditions. For example, according to practical commandments for the Ijtihad and taqlid, formulated in various Shiites sources, mujtahid, who is a role model for other people (these people are called "mukallid") should be at the same time just, live, male, adult, a Shiite, a follower of the twelve Imams of the Prophet (Khokhlysheva, 2006).

So, Islam in almost all countries where it is practiced, because of the specific of historical development is not only a religion but also a way of life and to a large extent the basis of Muslim civilizational identity. For centuries, Islam was an integral part of the social consciousness of Muslim nations which largely determines their historical traditions and mentality. In this sense, the role of religion in the Muslim world is different from that in countries where people profess the Christian faith which to a large extent has become a private matter for each individual. Islam, on the contrary, controls the social and cultural spheres of society, including the relationship between people, the behavior in everyday life,

family and marital relationships, as well as has a significant impact on the social and political life. In fact, all aspects of Muslim political culture are a legal, theological and political comment to the text of the Holy Quran. Therefore, the possibility of any meaningful leadership status in the Islamic world without ideological messages based on the Quran and facing the Ummah is categorically eliminated.

In this regard, unconditional relationship between political and spiritual leadership, traditionally having a charismatic nature, has a direct impact on the process of making political and state decisions in the Arab-Islamic countries and, consequently, on the domestic and foreign policies of these countries. Therefore, in the post-bipolar world this specific feature of building power relations that is typical for political culture of the Arab-Islamic world, according to the author, is a factor that can exert a fundamental influence on the course of the negotiation processes related to the settlement of the conflict in Palestine. In this regard, the involvement of Islamic religious leaders in the political debate on the Israeli-Palestinian problem is, of course, necessary as it will allow the participants to achieve a breakthrough and get a completely new angle on the standoff.

This new approach, first of all, requires changes inthe formof thenegotiationsbetween the Palestiniansand the Israelis.In this case, the concept ofthe negotiation process,in our opinion,should be basedon the following principles.

Firstly, it is necessary to involve the religious authorities of the Palestinian Authority and other Arab countries of the Islamic world to direct participation in the negotiations.

Secondly, it is necessary to fundamentally change the program of talks. Previously, the main feature of the negotiations was that the main point of the dialogue was the establishment of an independent Palestinian state and the return of Palestinian refugees while the status of Jerusalem and religious shrines was not a priority. According to the author, in new environment, the key issue of the peace agreement should be the resolution of problems associated with the Muslim holy sites in Jerusalem and the discussion of the status of the city as one of the most important religious centers of the world. Only after removing this obstacle it is worth talking about the features of the Palestinian state, its borders and the repatriation of Arab refugees to their homeland.

The main advantage of such approach to the Arab-Israeli negotiations is in the fact that the right of the Palestinian people for statehood will be taken into account as well as religious and political interests of the people of the Arab-Islamic world, including the Palestinians will be met.

Conclusion

Summarizing it should be noted that the Palestinian issue as a part of the Arab-Israeli conflict has a fundamental importance in the current system of international relations. Resolution process of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict has played a key role in ensuring the stability in the Middle East region, and also has a significant impact on the maintenance of international security at large. However, without consideration of the political leadership or, to be more precise, the religious and political leadership that is typical for the Arab-Islamic political culture, it is impossible to achieve successful implementation of the regional objectives because all the arrangements concerning Palestine do not have a legitimate character from the point of view of both the Palestinians and the people of other Muslim countries in the world. Therefore, in the author's opinion, without using such an innovative business model of the negotiation process it will be principally impossible to achieve a final settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

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