Hassan Al-Turabi’s Thought on Islamic State

###### ABSTRACT

Diskursus tentang negara Islam merupakan topik yang senantiasa menarik perhatian banyak kalangan. Seperti halnya kebanyakan ideologi dunia, Islam juga menghajatkan wahana kenegaraan dalam kerangka penerapan berbagai ajaran dan pemeliharaan eksistensi ummatnya dalam realitas kehidupan. Kejelasan konsepsi negara Islam dalam konteks negara modern menjadi keniscayaan para pemikir Islam kontemporer. Dalam konteks ini, pemikiran Hasan Al-Turabi, seorang tokoh kontroversial yang berada di balik upaya islamisasi kenegaraan di Sudan, menemukan relevansinya. Sebagai tokoh yang dipandang kontroversial, tidak mengherankan bila Al-Turabi sering dianggap sebagai seorang fundamentalis oleh Barat, namun dipandang liberal oleh kalangan pergerakan Islam kontemporer sendiri. Al-Turabi berupaya menginterasikan berbagai konsepsi kenegaraan dalam Islam dengan kondisi kekinian, dengan mengetengahkan pemikirannya yang lebih fleksibel.

#### **Introduction**

A State (or a number state) unreservedly based on Islam is the basic need of the Ummah. This is so not only to enable them to practice their faith freely and to present a model state power, but also to secure for Islam the political power which is an indispensable in converting the ideal into a living reality.

In the absence of an Islamic State, Islam has become a utopia even far the many Muslim who come to doubt its practicability in a modern and changing world. A true Islamic State will put the Islamic ideals into practice after many centuries in which local despots and colonialists have successfully brain washed many generations into believing that “religion” and “politics” cannot meet. Even many scholars of Islamic sciences have accepted the idea that they should not interfere in politics, and should render unto Caesar what is Caesar’s.[[1]](#footnote-2) The Ulama are resigned to the fate forced upon them in the dark roles: to amuse the sultans as their courties or to live in seclusion.

Hasan al-Turabi, Sudanese Islamist and political leader, has been characterized by some western sources as a fundamentalist[[2]](#footnote-3) whose nation is a source of terrorism. But, the others believe that he has a reputation for pragmatism and flexibility in the pursuit of resurgent Islam. Although he has never published a comprehensive account of his tought, but his various writings and pronouncement present a relatively liberal interpretation of Islam, including a belief in democracy and pluralism.

##### Profile and Biograph of Hassan Al-Turabi

Hassan Abdullah Dafa'allah al-Turabi was born in 1932 into a religious conservative Islamic family in Kassala, a town in Eastern Sudan. His father was a Judge and an expert in Islamic law. After having received a traditional Islamic education at home, he studied Law at Khartoum University, graduating in 1955. From here, he went to study for a Master's Degree in Law at University of London, which he completed in 1957, and then to the Sorbonne in Paris, where between 1959 and 1964 he wrote his doctoral thesis on the place of emergency powers within a liberal democracy.

On his return to Sudan, al-Turabi was appointed Dean of the Law Faculty at the University of Khartoum. He left this position within a few months, to become a Member of Parliament and the Secretary General of the Islamic Charter Front, an organization that desired a political system in conformity with the teachings of Islam. Electorally and intellectually, the Front's main rivals were the Communists and other socialists, who wanted a completely secular state able to modernize and develop Sudan along the lines then fashionable throughout the world.

In 1969, Sudanese democracy was overthrown by a leftist coup. The Nimeiri Dictatorship that resulted was unwilling to tolerate opposition, and so for the next eight years, al- Turabi was to suffer repeated arrest and imprisonment. He was arrested again in March 1985, during the popular turbulence that preceded the overthrow of President Nimeiri.

During the next four years, al-Turabi was a senior figure in Sudanese politics. He led the National Islamic Front, which emerged as the second largest party after the 1986 General Election. As a member of various coalition governments, he served as Attorney General, Minister of Justice, Minister of Foreign Affairs, and Deputy Prime Minister.

After the coup of 1989, al- Turabi was arrested again. However, as several members of the new Government were spiritually close to him, he was soon released, and was able to rise to a position of considerable eminence. Since 1991, he has been Secretary General of the Arab and Islamic Congress, an organization with branches in 55 Islamic and Western countries. Since 1996, he has been Speaker of the Sudanese Parliament.

He also founded the Arab and Islamic Congress, a sort of Islamist International with branches in 55 Islamic and Western countries and contacts with all kinds of Islamist groups and figures from mild to militant-including Osama Bin Laden. Since 1991, he has been Secretary General of the Arab and Islamic Congress. Even if not so famous in the Western world, al-Turabi's great influence in the world of Islamists is undeniable. Most observers of politics give him credit for masterminding the Islamic revolution in Sudan -- or more precisely the military coup in 1989 that brought down Sudan's third experiment with parliamentary democracy -- and ushered in what al-Turabi would probably describe as its fourth.

The precise extent of his influence is debatable. Some claim that he is the real head of government in Sudan, others that his function is almost wholly decorative. The truth probably lies somewhere between these extremes. Al-Turabi does seem to have had a profound influence over many aspects of Sudanese state policy - though the claims that he is behind every act of that State is almost certainly exaggerated.

Al-Turabi is a controversial figure within Islam - bearing in mind the boldness with which he sweeps away the traditions of centuries to get at what he considers to be the fundamentals of his faith, and how he nearly always manages to find that these fundamentals are not only compatible with but also require the establishment of what we in the West would see a classical liberal order.

Al-Turabi has devoted his life to reconciling Islam with the modern sciences. He accepts the truth of both, and regards it as the highest task of the philosopher to bring apparent contradictions into harmony. It is for this reason, that his name has earlier been mentioned in conjunction with that of Aquinas: both are involved in the same business of intellectual reconciliation.

##### His Political Philosophy

Al-Turabi is a strong believer in the use of the Qur'an as a full guide to life, not just defining inner belief and religious ceremony but giving a guide to government, to economics, and a method of administering justice. His view of an Islamic state implements all parts of Islam, a government with an Islamic constitution, an economic system free of interest which cares for the poor and a legal system that implements *syari'ah*.

Al-Turabi advocates *tajdid*, renewal of Islamic thought and jurisprudence. He believes the renewal is necessary as a result of the long drought of original Islamic thought and in order to respond to the strength of the West. He suggests achieving this change in the 'usul, the methodology and basis of fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence). The 'usul was developed by the first generations of ulamas and has not since been revised. As science, social sciences, and research methodologies are now more fully explored it becomes necessary to update the 'usul in order to end stagnation in fiqh. Al-Turabi believes that the current 'usul limits the ability to develop fiqh to deal with issues beyond individual matters including governing, economics, and politics. A fuller, more modern fiqh would then carryover into the areas he cares about, bringing about better Islamic states and giving guides to dealing with the many problems that exist in the worlds many predominantly Muslim countries.

Similarly he believes that for the Muslim world to progress it is necessary to open the door to ijtihad to all Muslims willing and competent to pursue it, and coordinate with others in the same quest. In someways this would be a scientific community of original thinkers in that they would coordinate with each other, provide for a peer review process, and allow them to build the conclusions of others. However this would not be a professional class like scientists, he believes that "ijtihad is not a vocation of a specific group of people" and while "people can attain various degrees of it" anyone an engage in it and it will not be the responsibility of a dedicated priest class. Beyond this, the Islamic state would then take the consensus of the new 'ulama and be able to enforce it.

Hasan Al-Turabi is an intelligent and eloquent politician who has professed to progressive Qur'anic ideals who has achieved great advances in women's rights. His means of pursuing those goals however have often violated the selfsame ideals and the failure of even these radical methods to achieve the stable Islamic state he desires condemns him. His dream of an Islamic state would easily form a better government then most other 'Islamic' governments but that dream has been obscured by the reality in Sudan. Likewise his hope for an Islamic renaissance has been shattered by Sudan's strife; hungry people afraid to express original though cannot build the base for reinvigorated and complete Islamic philosophy. Should Sudan continue on its present path and fail to transition into al-Turabi's dream republic outside of his achievements on behalf of women he will be remember for the crimes of his regime and as the villain the Western press largely made him out to be. Ultimately he is a complex figure of high ideals and low tactics who may have prevented Sudan from developing into a successful secular state and who as yet to realize an Islamic one.

Hasan al-Turabi is universally acknowledged as an intelligent, eloquent, and a personable figure but clarity on this complex man end there. He is also interesting as an example of a philosophical type that has not been seen in our civilization since the mediaeval schoolmen. With the possible exception of Ayn Rand, few Western thinkers are troubled by the need to present a unified theory of being and consciousness. Hardly any of us has thought about the relationship between the Law of the Conservation of Motion and the causes of inflation, and between these and the nature of the soul. Hardly any of us would think such matters of the least importance. We have acquired the habit of seeing knowledge as a set of disciplines more or less self-contained. Hassan al-Turabi, on the other hand, does think in such terms.

This is because, like earlier Islamic and Christian thinkers such as Avicenna and Thomas Aquinas, he sees the world as an integrated expression of the Divine Mind. Yet his generation within the Islamic world has been profoundly shaken by the collision of this traditional culture with the empirical, secular civilization of the West. It began as a clash of armed forces, in which the West was almost continually the victor. But it has ended as the conquest of minds. Just as the influence of Rome in Western Europe reached its height long after the dissolution of the legions and the transfer of the Imperial Title to the banks of the Hellespont, so the grants of formal independence from the British and French Empires has been followed by a still more complete hegemony over the Arab mind of concepts first discussed in Paris and London.

##### His ideas on Women are more liberal than those of most Muslim religious scholars, certainly more so than those expounded by the Al-Azhar establishment. In 1973 he wrote a book on women’s role (On the Position of Women in Islam and in Islamic Society) and had it published anonymously because of its controversial content.

##### Islamic State in His Concept

According to al-Turabi, an Islamic State cannot be isolated from society because Islam in a comprehensive and integrative way of lives. The division between private and public, the state and society, that is familiar in Western culture, has not been known in Islam.[[3]](#footnote-4) In this view Islam does not dictate any particular system of government, nor any system of economy. Instead there are certain Islamic political principle, including *syura* (participation), justice, and certain economy precepts such as providing for the poor and fair distribution of wealth, which should guide moslem’s participation in political affairs.

The ideological foundation of an Islamic state, in his view, lies in the doctrine of Tauhid (the unity of God and of human life) as a comprehensive and exclusive of worship. This fundamental principle of belief has four consequences for an Islamic state. *First,* The Islamic state is not secular. All public life in Islam is religious, being permeated by the experience of the divine. Its function is to pursue the service of God as expressed in a concrete way in the *syari’ah*, the religious law.

*Second*, an Islamic state is not a nationalistic state because ultimate allegiance is owed to God and thereby to the community of all believers – *the Ummah.*

*Third*, an Islamic state is not an absolute or sovereign entity. It is subject to the higher norms of the *syari’ah* that represent the will of God. Politically this rules out all form of absolutism. Legally it paves the way for the development of constitutional law, a set of norms limiting state powers. Because the Islamic state is not absolute, Muslims have also known from the beginning the rules of international law that derive from the supreme syari’ah and bind the state in its relation to other states and peoples.

*Fourth*, an Islamic state is not primordia; the primary institution in Islam is the *ummah*. The phrase “Islamic state” itself is misnomer. The state is only the political dimension of the collective endeavor of Muslims. Yhe norms of Islam are only partly legal depending on the sanction of state power. For most of it, the implementation of the *syari’ah* is left to the free conscience of believers or to informal means of social control.[[4]](#footnote-5)

His Islamic state would be democratic in his view, but democratic without the sectarianism and corruption of the West. His ideal country would eliminate money from the electoral process through the establishment of independent election commission which would choose candidates and inform the public about them. In this single party state candidates would owe no party alliance and would be under no monetary influence as there would be no candidate run elections. Thus the only significant difference between a Western republic and Islamic republic is that the Western electorate does not believe in God. He argues that without acknowledgement that God creates men women, public life can become very corrupt.

The state consists of people, territory, and powers: executive, legislative and judicial. The state has to recognize the religious beliefs of people. The state has to legislate to regulate some aspects of national religious communities, and the courts have to adjudicate in such matters. Constitutional legal and judiciary procedure involve extensive oaths, which have a religious content, and so on. Religion must form an integral part of political life.

According to al-Turabi, the executive ‘branch is the nucleus of authority and the active force in the government’. It is designated in the *Qur’an* and the *hadits* as *ulul amri* and *umara’* and is headed by the *amir* (leader) who will be elected from the most respectable and most pious persons. The form of government is determined by the foregoing principles of tauhid, entailing the freedom, equality and unity of believers. One can call an Islamic state a republic since the syari’ah rules out usurpation and succession as ground of political legitimacy.[[5]](#footnote-6) In early Islam, the system of government was called a caliphate (al-khilafah).

The caliphate began, according to al-Turabi, as an elected consultative constitution and the syura are mandatory for the resolution for all-important public issues and the outcome of such a process is binding upon the ruler.[[6]](#footnote-7)

In area of women’s right he has strong progressive views matched by a strong record. By going back to Qur’anic law he has worked to sweep aside cultural discrimination so me of which had dated to the classical period of Islam. Though the Sudanese Moslem Brotherhood was an all male organization has developed into a political organization he included women and their agenda and began to work liberate them from the cultural chains put upon them. Women in Sudan are now allowed full freedom of mobility and allowed to attend Mosque’s at will unlike an earlier time in Sudanese history where women were commanded to their side of the house. Women are granted the same civil rights as men and are allowed to vote and hold public office in the Sudanese Parliament. The Sudanese parliament is currently one quarter female and a law exist which demands that at least 10 % of parliament must be female.

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1. The idea of separating religion and the state emerged in Enlightenment Europe in reaction against the political dominance of the Roman Catholic Church and the doctrine of the “Divine Right of Kings”. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. The term fundamentalism is perceived with negative connotations by most Muslims who suspect the intentions of those who insist on using the term to describe Islam, its movement or its followers. Daniel Pipes refer a fundamentalist to the one who advocates the establishment or implementation of Syari'ah. Hassan al-Turabi view fundamentalism as a movement of historical change, a movement of revival. The term does not reflect true facts. All of us are fundamentalists according to the definition in Western culture, that whoever believes the Bible is the word of God is a fundamentalist. The Western perception of fundamentalism is heavily influenced by American Protestantism, a movement in 20th century Protestantism emphasizing the literally interpreted Bible as fundamental to Christian life and teaching. The use of the term was then extended to describe the movement within any religion towards the fundamental doctrine out of which the religion has grown, and a refusal to depart from it in order to accommodate extraneous social or moral requirements.

   The French use the word intrégrisme, a term coined by the French right-wing intellectual Charles Maurras, who was an anti-democrat and a supporter of the Vichy government during the Nazi occupation of France from 1940 to 1945. He introduced the term to denote the aim of bringing all distinct characteristics of a nation within purview of its political Organization, so that, e.g., the Roman Catholic Church in France would be regarded as an integral part of the political structure of the country, along with the language, customs and traditions of the people.. Intégrisme is the term most often used to refer to the Islamists in the French language media in France and in North Africa. See Abootalebi, Ali R. *Islam, Islamist and Democracy.* Journal of Middle East Review of International Affairs. Vo. 3 No. 1 March 1999 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Hassan al-Turabi, The Islamic State in Esposito, John L. *Voices of Resurgent Islam*. Oxford University Press. New York. 1983. page 241 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Hassan al-Turabi, The Islamic State in Esposito, John L. *Voices of Resurgent Islam*. Oxford University Press. New York. 1983. page 241-243 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. Hassan al-Turabi, The Islamic State in Esposito, John L. *Voices of Resurgent Islam*. Oxford University Press. New York. 1983. page 243 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. A. R. Moten, Political Science: An Islamic Perspective. MacMillan Press Ltd. London. 1996 page 101-102 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)