



THE SECRETS OF THE MUSLIM WARS

HASSAN AJAMI

Freelance journalist, An adjunct Professor of Arabic language, Thunderbird School of Global Management, USA



HASSAN AJAMI

ABSTRACT

We usually think that today the dominant conflicts in the Middle East are between the Sunnis and the Shiites. But this is not an accurate account of what is going on. This is so because the Sunnis are divided into different schools of thought, exactly as the Shiites are. In fact, there are at least three secrets of the current Muslim wars, which this article aims to clarify.

©KY Publications

Facts about Islam

There are distinct sects in Islam, such as Sunnism and Shiism. Yet most of the Muslims are Sunnis. Sunnism itself is divided into five different traditional schools: Hanafi, Hanbali, Maliki, Shafi'i, and Zahiri. Whether a Muslim belongs to one of these schools of jurisprudence rather than another will ultimately lead to huge difference. For example, a Muslim following the Shafi'i doctrine tends to be moderate, while a Muslim following Hanbalism tends to be a strict Muslim and probably a radical Muslim, in the sense that he or she is inclined to reject other Muslims, especially the Shiites, and consider them as well as the Jews and the Christians as unbelievers. There are also other influential Sunni movements, such as Wahhabism and the Salafis, including ISIS. And they represent radical Islam in the previous sense. Yet some followers of Wahhabism might probably not act in accordance to their theological beliefs, while the Salafis usually do. And this is why some Wahhabis allied themselves with the West, but most Salafis declared war against the West.

Similarly, the Shiites are divided into diverse and conflicting schools. According to Shiism, a Shii person should follow a living imam, who is supposed to provide his followers with the true interpretation of Islam. But there are many living Shii imams who differ in their theological and political views. This is why the Shiites are also divided into competing religious and political movements. For instance, the Shiites following Khamenei of Iran tend to be more radical, in the sense of rejecting the West, than the Shiites following Al-Sistani of Iraq. The former are inclined to reject the Sunnis and the West in addition to considering the United States as their enemy, while the latter tend to be moderate in the sense that they usually ally themselves with the West.

Given these theological and political divisions among the Sunnis themselves as well as among the Shiites, it is legitimate to infer that the wars and conflicts in the Middle East are not in fact between Sunnism and Shiism. Rather, they are between the distinct theological and political Islamic movements previously mentioned. This is why some Sunnis are fighting other Sunnis, such as the Wahhabis of Saudi Arabia who engaged in combating the Sunnis of ISIS. And this is also why some Shii groups allied themselves with some Sunnis in an effort to defeat ISIS, which is composed of Sunni Salafis.



In order to gain a deeper understanding of what is happening in the Arab-Islamic world, it is important and necessary to reveal at least three secrets. The first secret is that there is no Islam. Instead, there are Islams manifested in diverse theological and political schools. The Muslims don't form a homogeneous community. Rather, they are divided into conflicting camps possessing radically competing ideologies. And, obviously, this explains the conflicts among the Muslims. The second secret is that there are neither Sunnis nor Shiites. As we have seen, there are different and conflicting schools among the Sunnis as well as among the Shiites. And this explains why the alliances among the Muslim groups constantly and surprisingly shift, and the alliances between the Muslims and the West are subject to sudden and surprising changes. For example, some Shiites ally themselves with the West, while other Shiites consider the West as their enemy. This happens because there is no Shiism, but rather there are distinct and competing Shii schools. And some Shii groups ally themselves with some Sunni groups because the distinction between Shiism and Sunnism is illusory. Using the terms Shiism and Sunnism is just a convenient way of discussing certain topics, given that both of these terms don't really refer to definite sects.

The Crisis of the Islamic Identity

The third secret is related to the previous ones. Since there is no one definite Islam, and the distinction between Sunnis and Shiites is illusory, it follows that most Muslims today can't obtain their identities but through engaging in conflicts. Most Muslims are no longer able to identify themselves as just being Muslims, Sunnis or Shiites because of the tremendous divisions within all of the Muslim communities. This is why a Muslim attempting to repossess his or her identity as a Muslim will probably identify himself or herself as a Mujahid, i.e. a Muslim warrior, fighting against other Muslims or the West. And this explains why there are continuous wars in the Middle East.

Bernard Lewis expressed the fact that there is no single unified identity in the Middle East. He held that there are multiple identities in the Middle East, and each Middle Easterner has several conflicting identities. One of his examples is that an Egyptian might identify himself or herself as an Egyptian, an Arab or a Muslim. According to Lewis, these different identities, which are being an Egyptian, an Arab and a Muslim, are usually in conflict. For instance, a person identifying himself or herself as an Arab aspires to unite all of the Arab countries in one single Arab nation, leading him or her to be an Arab nationalist. But a person identifying himself or herself as a Muslim aspires to unite all of the Muslim countries in one Islamic nation, leading the person in question to be a Muslim fundamentalist or extremely traditionalist. And these ideologies are in conflict. Yet they are formed in light of the previous competing identities. Hence, the identities of a Middle Easterner are in conflict.

The identity crisis in the Arab-Islamic world is still an ongoing problem, which needs to be solved. This is so because no one can survive without a stable and dominant identity. And, unfortunately, being a Mujahid turned out to be an easy solution to this identity crisis. There are distinct meanings of being a Mujahid, such as being actually engaged in war or speaking against one's enemy. Yet, nowadays, participating in wars became a strong and common tendency among many Muslims in order to acquire a definite Islamic identity. The fact that many Muslims lost their identities as just being Muslims, Sunnis or Shiites led most of them to identify themselves as warriors of Islam.

The Indeterminacy of Islam

Islam itself is indeterminate. And this is basically why there are many Islams rather than one specific Islam. The Quran contains totally different and seemingly conflicting beliefs and principles. This shows that it is indeterminate what the Quran is really saying, and hence it is indeterminate what Islam is. This fact has been implied in one of the sayings of Imam Ali, who is highly respected by all of the Muslims. He said that "the Quran possesses many faces". This means that the Quran can be accurately and easily interpreted in radically different ways. This indicates that, in fact, it is indeterminate what the Quran is actually stating, and thus it is

International Journal of Law, Education, Social and Sports Studies (IJLESS)

A Peer Reviewed (Refereed) International Research Journal

Homepage: www.ijless.kypublications.com



uncertain what Islam is. The uncertainty of Islam is not a failure on our behalf to understand Islam, but rather it is an intrinsic and objective property of Islam itself.

For example, the Quran says that everything is from God, and that God created humans and what humans do. This shows that, in Islam, everything is predetermined by God, and human beings are not free. Yet, at the same time, the Quran says that God doesn't change people unless they change themselves, and calls for people to freely and willingly choose Islam or not to choose it as their religion. These verses indicate that, in Islam, humans are free and God does not predetermine everything. So there are Quranic verses stating that humans are not free and everything is predetermined by God, while there are other Quranic verses holding that humans are free and God doesn't predetermine everything. In addition, one Quranic verse maintains that people will see God on the Day of Judgment, while another Quranic verse says that God can't be seen. Similarly, some Quranic verses call for punishing the guilty and ask to apply the principle of an eye for an eye, while other Quranic verses emphasize that forgiving others for their wrongdoings is the best moral path. All of this reveals that it is indeterminate what Islam is. And this indeterminacy will constantly lead to divisions and wars among the Muslims themselves because they will always disagree on what Islam is.

In conclusion, it is hard to understand what is going on in the Arab-Islamic world, especially with regard to the Muslim conflicts, without taking into consideration the facts that there is no definite Islam, the terms Sunnism and Shiism are just convenient ways of discussing certain topics, and the crisis of the Islamic identity. The indeterminacy of Islam explains why most of the Muslims are in disagreement and at war against each other. The uncertainty about what will happen to the Arab-Islamic world reflects the uncertainty of Islam.

References

- [1]. Lewis, Bernard: *The Multiple Identities of the Middle East*. 1998. Schocken Books.
- [2]. *The Holy Quran: English Translation, Commentary and Notes with Full Arabic Text*. (English and Arabic Edition). By: Abdullah Yusuf Ali (Author). 2001. Kitab Bhavan.

Brief Biography of Author

Hassan Ajami is a Lebanese author and freelance journalist, an adjunct professor of Arabic language at Thunderbird School of Global Management, and an instructor of Arabic and Islamic philosophy at Arizona State University. He published seventeen books in Arabic, and two books in English entitled "Arab-Islamic Communication & Arabic Language" and "A Short Philosophical and Poetic Journey".