
BOOK REVIEW

Bassam Tibi, *Political Islam, World Politics and Europe from Jihadist to Institutional Islamism*, New York: Routledge, 2014.

This book discusses the idea of political Islam and its impact on Europe.

In the first chapter of this book the author attempts to introduce the concept of Islam along with the idea of democracy.

After discussing the core elements of Islam and democracy, in the second chapter, the author analyzes cultural diversity which is a significant constituent of any civilization or society. It is important to address the element of cultural differences when discussing Islam and democracy, for whereas Islam offers guidance on all aspects of human life and society, democracy is a pluralistic political system. Islam too has elements of pluralism in it.

In the third chapter, Bassam Tibi evaluates the role of contemporary Islamist internationalism in world politics as a replacement of Communist internationalism. Over the centuries sectarian divisions have arisen in Islam along with ethnic and cultural divisions. This chapter focuses upon the Sunni variety of Jihadist internationalism, which originated in the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt in 1928. It is mostly non-state actors who are involved in Jihadist internationalism though on occasions there has been a strong element of state patronage involved.

The fourth chapter deals with Shi'ite internationalism which is represented by the Islamic Republic of Iran. The Iranian revolution is a vibrant example of the political development of Islam, especially in the Middle East. Though it was praised worldwide, owing to its Shi'ite character, this model of Islamic revolution was not adopted universally.

In the fifth chapter, the author discusses the relationship between Islam and Europe. It provides the reader with a vivid picture of the intertwined histories of Europe and the Mediterranean regions. The interaction between Christianity and Islam has been marked by jihad and crusade on

the negative side, while on the positive side is the inter and cross cultural fertilization.

In the next chapter, the author discusses the contemporary issue of migration of Muslims to Europe, forming sizeable Muslim diasporas in the continent. Here the question arises whether the Muslim migrants will continue to live like aliens in Europe, unable to assimilate with the native people? Is there a chance that the Muslim migrants will ever become part and parcel of the European civilization and will not try to Islamize the continent? Of course integration is a two way process.

In chapter seven, Bassam Tibi has tried to prove his argument that Islam is compatible with democracy, human rights and civil society – only if Muslims become genuinely interested in and flexible enough for establishing these contemporary values.

In the next chapter, the author dilates upon the disputes within Islam. The author argues that the differences in Islam are not on the concept and application of Shariah rather about the different understanding of the notion of Shariah and on selecting the right one. Further, the author explores whether and how political Islam can be given a role in global democracy. In this connection, he has discussed the work of Abdou Filali-Ansary, who is known as a prominent proponent of “Enlightened Muslim thought”.

In the last chapter, the author contends that while political Islam promises to safeguard the rights and morals of Muslims, when it uses the Shariah as a tool of politics, complications arise. International political Islam and its diverse versions clash with the concept of universal democratic constitutionalism as a basis for world peace, and Islamic Shariah becomes an obstacle in the path of Political Islam’s integration in the international society committed to cosmopolitan democracy.

The findings of this study suggest that Islam in its true form is a religion upholding universal peace and harmony and it can accommodate democracy, if it is not politicized in a manner that involves the manipulation of the Shariah, which has been widely misused for the perpetuation of personal power and material greed.

Secondly, seen in the context of Europe, Islam is a religion which has strong elements of pluralism when it is practiced in its pure form and when its practitioners acknowledge the common values with other religions. Thus Muslims can integrate in Western societies; but it is important to understand that this is a two way process so that the cooperation of the other party, in this case the host society is essential.

To sum up, this book has discussed core sensitive issues in a comprehensive but subtle manner. This book provides the reader a panoramic view of Islam in the context of contemporary global politics. It opens up one's mind and compels one to view the world in a broader and more liberal perspective.

This book is highly recommended for research students working on the dynamics of the Middle East, Islam and Europe.

Jaweria Tahir