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Muhammad in History, Thought, and Culture: An Encyclopedia of the Prophet of God
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NATION-STATE

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A nation-state is a kind of polity or political unit of analysis and consists of the elements of authority (form of government), nationality (large number of people called citizens), territoriality (juridical set of legal boundaries), and sovereignty (attained through the recognition bestowed by another nation-state or simply by an international organization such as the United Nations). Moreover, the nation-state

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is a modern entity that evolved from Greek and Italian city-states and the Roman's res publica to the Western nation-state system, which was conceived by European political elites and commonly attributed by some political and social scientists as a product of the Peace of Westphalia in 1648.

In spite of that understanding, Western scholars (Orientalists) at times consciously overlook the contributions of Asian or Middle Eastern scholars (particularly Islamicist) to the literature on the study of nation-state. The Prophet Muhammad, subsequent members of 'ulama' (scholars), and jurists have also contributed to the conception and evolution of the nation-state phenomenon.

Etymology and History

Islamicists regard the nation-state as an equivalent of *dawla* (country) under the guidance of the concept of *umma* (community of believers of Islam). There are two approaches related to the emergence of *dawla* in Islamic history. The first approach was the post-Hijra period (the migration or escape from persecution of the Prophet and his followers from Mecca to Medina in 622 CE) in which Medina under the tutelage of the Prophet carried all functions of a state structure and the institutionalization of political power. The second approach claims that the Medinan society is based not on state structure but on a community structure because the Prophet was merely a religious leader and not a political one.

The Hijra is viewed as a great event in the history of Islamic civilization because it is the beginning of a strengthening of a more consolidated community of believers of one God. It is a stage of the Prophet's political life in which he displayed outstanding diplomatic skills and prudence that enabled him to unite all tribes, ethnicities, and religious communities (Jews and Christians) in Medina into a single political polity through the establishment of a constitution or charter (*al-Kitab* or *al-Sahifa*), which is agreed by all parties to provide mutual support especially in times of war (collective security), equal sociopolitical recognition, and economic solidarity.

The *umma* is considered to be the basic unit of analysis. According to Ayubi, the *umma* is given an ideological definition by the jurists: its universal function is the propagation of the

divine message (*da'wa*). The Islamic nation-state is not therefore an autocracy or a theocracy but instead is a nomocracy (government based on the rule of law) (Ayubi 1991, 22). In addition, the term *ummat al-muslima* (Muslim community) has more significance than the earlier term *ummat al-muslimin* (community constituting Muslims). The *ummat al-muslima* logically includes the *ummat al-muslimin*, but the latter would not necessarily be the *umma*. The *umma* signifies that in addition to each member being a Muslim and thus obedient to God, the community qua community must also be submissive to God (Davutoglu 1994, 182–183).

Characteristics and Evolution

The most striking antecedent of early Islamic history is the composition of the Medinan Charter (also known as the Constitution of Medina). This charter modified a state of solitary enmity to a harmonious condition of living together (i.e.,

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mutually exclusive and symbiotically beneficial). The Medinan Charter defined a new political membership and status that destroyed traditional tribal membership in Arab society. Contrary to ethnic origin, *jus soli* (place of birth) or *jus sanguinis* (nationality of one's parents) as the criterion for citizenship in a secular nation-state system, Islamic political understanding presupposes a voluntary acceptance of a Muslim community through a sociopolitical identification dependent on a unilateral declaration before two witnesses: the unity of Allah and the prophetic function of Muhammad to become a bona fide member of the *umma*.

According to Hassan (1981, 40), every human being has the right to become a Muslim regardless of gender, race, color of skin, or language as accorded in the Qur'anic verses stating that "believers are but a single brotherhood" (Q 49:10) and "we made you into nations and tribes, that you may recognize each other" (Q 49:13), emphasizing that all regional and tribal distinctions are merely of a geographical nature.

People of the Book (*Ahl al-Kitab*) or resident non-Muslims (*dhimmis*), mainly Jews and Christians, who accept the political sovereignty and patronage of the Muslim state as the realization of the political power of the *umma* and have the autonomy to pursue their own lifestyles within a pluralistic legal structure are also bound to the community by the same concept of loyalty. They are accorded their freedom of belief, security of life and possessions, and usually exemption from military service in return for paying a sort of poll tax, or *jizya*. In addition, other non-Muslim religious minorities also formed an integral (social and economic) part of the Islamic nation-state, particularly during the Ottoman regime.

The Islamic nation-state system is divided into *Dar al-Islam* (the House of Islam, where Muslims rule), *Dar al-Harb* (the House of War, consisting of the rest of the world), and *Dar al-'Ahad* (the House of Truce) or *Dar al-Sulh* (the House of Covenant), which indicate those states that have peaceful agreements with an Islamic state from those that do not. However, many Hanafi scholars insisted that there were only two divisions, because if the inhabitants of a territory had concluded a treaty of peace, it became a part of *Dar al-Islam* automatically. *Dar* (place) has been applied to the Islamic juristic scheme together with its dimension of political authority and power. Ibn 'Abidin defines *dar* as "the country under the government of a Muslim or non-Muslim," while al-Jassas defines it as referring to political power and hegemony.

Another evolutionary characteristic was the three stages of semantic transformation of the concept of *dawla*. In the first stage, the word was used to mean a change of political power or the victory of one dynasty over another. The second stage was used for the ultimate political authority and structure rather than to mean political change. The last stage

occurred after the political supremacy of the Western international system based on individual nation-states. The concept of *dawla* has been used as the translation of "nation-state" in several Muslim languages during the last stage.

Consequently, the main function of a nation-state in juridical Islamic writings is ideological: an expression of a militant cultural mission that is religious in character and universal in orientation. Furthermore, an Islamic nation-state in reality

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emphasizes cultural cohesion, which is more significant than societal fraternity. The Islamic nation-state defines morality and does not give importance to any private and/or public ethical domains and rejects any forms of physical borders or ethnical boundaries. Simply, the Islamic nation-state philosophically aims at and encompasses the whole universe or entire cosmos.

See also: Governance; Politics, Qur'anic; Qur'an; *Umma*

Further Reading

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Adiong, Nassef Manabilang. "NATION-STATE." *Muhammad in History, Thought, and Culture: An Encyclopedia of the Prophet of God*. Ed. Adam Walker, Coeli Fitzpatrick. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2014. *ABC-CLIO eBook Collection*. Web. 22 Aug 2014.

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