ORIGINAL ARTICLE

The Basis of Leadership in Islam

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses the basis of leadership in Islam as applied by the Prophet (pbuh) in managing affairs according to Islamic teachings. The purpose of this article is to analyse current Islamic leadership. The effectiveness of leadership during the Meccan period is considered the early stage in the formation of Islamic leadership. The Muslim ummah needs to make the Prophet (pbuh) as a role model for the responsibility of implementing more efficient management of Islamic affairs based on al-Quran and al-Sunnah. In order to fulfill the criteria of the best leadership, a leader has to satisfy the prerequisites of having a sound physique and being spiritually steadfast with a strong belief and faith in Allah swt as well as practising all the teachings of the Prophet (pbuh) in leading the ummah, while being virtuous in conduct, knowledgeable, sharp-witted and morally firm, for the sake of building a dynamic Islamic society.

Key Words: Islamic leadership, basis, objective, characteristic.

Introduction

Leadership is important in regulating for a better and more secure human life. It is the process which mobilizes an individual or society to achieve the desired objectives. Thus, it plays an important role in building a society or state which is administered based on Islamic principles and procedures. The best undisputed example for us to emulate is the leadership of the Prophet (pbuh) in affairs of the world and the hereafter, based on the words of Allah in Surah al-Ahzab, 21: ‘There has certainly been for you in the Messenger of Allah an excellent pattern for anyone whose hope is in Allah and the Last day and (who) remembers Allah often’.

This verse clearly shows that Allah intends that people who seek the pleasure of Allah and reward in the hereafter, should emulate the Prophet (pbuh) as the best model. The importance of this leadership encompasses all facets of life, particularly in the discipline of Islamic management. This is clearly projected by the Prophet (pbuh) himself in administering matters of the Shariah smoothly and properly. The management of Islamic preaching (Da’wah) is given special attention by him to ensure constant monitoring parallel with control over Islamic Aqidah, Shariah and moral conduct (Akhlaq Islamiyyah).
Leadership in Islam:

Leadership is one basic aspect in forming a society, institution or state. Thus due emphasis needs to be
given to this aspect to ensure that a society, institution or state fully implements Islamic leadership. The
importance of leadership cannot be disputed as without it, all administrative affairs may be stalled. Thus, Islam
places much importance on the concept of leadership even if within a small group. The Prophet (pbuh) says:
‘When three persons set out on a journey, they should appoint one of them as their leader’.

Leadership or al-Qiyadah is generally associated with al-Siyasah, al-Siyadah, al-Imamah, al-‘Umara’, al-
Ri’ayah, al-Wilayah, al-Ri’asah and al-Khilafah. All these words are defined as leadership. Thus, leadership in
Arabic language covers a wide area and is not limited to state or racial (group) leadership, but extends to
leadership in the fields of knowledge, worship as well as custody and guardianship of a trust (Andek Kelawa,
1999). Leadership is the influence exerted by an individual in a situation directed towards achieving
specific objective or objectives (Mohd. Yusof, 1990).

Most definitions of leadership reflect the process of a leader’s influence on his followers. This means that a
leader tries to influence people under him to achieve the desired objectives (Mohd. Yusof, 1990). This shows
that the process of leadership involves a two-way relationship to achieve common goals. Generally, a leader is a
servant of Allah selected based on the majority vote of people. He is the trustee in shaping and developing
society in all aspects of life based on his planning policies. Human development is important and needs to be
implemented as best as possible to seek Allah’s pleasure and the love of the people as his success as a leader is
judged by the people.

Leadership from the Islamic perspective refers to the Prophet’s (pbuh) leadership as Qudwah hasanah (good
effect). Leadership recommended by Islam is based strictly on the teachings in al-Quran and al-Sunnah
without deviating from their teachings. The Prophet (pbuh) stated that all people are leaders responsible for the
people they lead in his Hadith: ‘Everyone of you is a guardian and answerable with regard to his trust’. In an in-
depth discussion of leadership, we should know of matters related to the objectives, characteristics and
leadership example shown by the Prophet (pbuh) as a guide for the Muslim ummah.

Objectives of Islamic Leadership:

In ensuring the realisation of this leadership concept abides by Islamic principles, it must constantly centre
around certain Islamically outlined objectives and purpose. Islam places utmost importance on these objectives
because they symbolise the extent of effectiveness of the leadership, whether at a high level or otherwise.
Among the objectives and purpose of Islamic leadership are as follows:

i) To Implement Islamic Shariah:

This is the most important duty of every leader for without state authority the Shariah would be impossible
to implement and enforce. Neglecting this task in ruling would negative leadership itself. Islam is a perfect
religion, hence the responsibility of a Muslim leader would take into account the perfection of religion in
implementing Shariah (Rejab, 1985).

A leader is a trustee of Allah in implementing the Shariah. They are guardians of Aqidah, property and
people’s integrity. Implementation of Shariah is a must in all aspects of life with the purpose of eliminating vice
and corruption on earth. Allah command in Surah al-Hijr, 41: ‘This is a path (of return) to Me (that is) straight’.

This verse makes clear that the duty of a leader is to seriously execute Allah’s trust and be willing to accept
this responsibility. Otherwise, it is considered a betrayal of Allah’s trust. A leader is also bound to Islamic
regulations and may continue to hold the trust subject to Shariah rule. Administration is subject to Islamic ethics
particularly when dealing with enemies or foes (Altalib, 1992).

ii) Personal Submission to Allah:

The objective of Islamic leadership is to ensure that he personally and others under his leadership submit to
Allah. Islam stipulates that every activity by the ummah is worship as prescribed by Allah in Surah al-Dhariyat,
56: ‘And I did not create the jinn and mankind except to worship me’. Among other matters, this verse explains
that the chief objective in creation of man is for him to submit to Allah. Thus, it is the duty of each leader to
ensure that this objective is achieved through his leadership based on the Islamic order.

iii) Commanding to the Known Good and Forbidding the Reprehensible:

In Islamic leadership, the objective of commanding to the known good by a duly constituted government
and forbidding the reprehensible is essential. It is appropriate that this process of enforcement be simultaneous.
In implementation, every preacher is a leader. Thus to reform and bring the society fully over to the direction of an Islamic order, preachers must be able to lead (Othman, 1990).

A leader will be more effective if there is someone or institution to direct and oversee such efforts. A good leader or government will make the efforts of al-Amr bi al-ma‘ruf wa al-nahy ‘an al-munkar as the top agenda for the ummah’s development. Allah says in Surah Ali-Imran, 110: ‘You (O Muhammad’s ummah) are the best nation produced (as an example) for mankind. You enjoin what is good and forbid what is wrong and believe in Allah. If only the people of the Scripture had believed, it would have been better for them. Among them are believers but most of them are defiantly disobedient’.

It is imperative for a leader to call on his fellow men to preach in the name of Allah as the essential duty of a leader is to keep the faith (Aqidah) pure and free from superstition (Khamis, 1974). In addition, a leader must strive with commitment so that society will comply with the Shariah and be anchored together in the good.

iv) Maintaining Welfare:

A leader must ensure the well-being of the individuals and society to achieve the aspirations of al-Falah (success) and al-Salah (good). At the most basic level, al-Quran urges the head of the family (husband) to look after his family (wife and children) from committing vice which will lead them to hell. Even though it refers to the family institution, it needs to be interpreted in a wider context of society and country, inasmuch as to achieve an atmosphere of well-being and harmony for the society. A leader is also responsible for overcoming any disputes or differences within society. Allah commands in Surah al-Hujurat, 9: ‘And if two factions among the believers should fight, then make settlement between the two. But if one of them oppresses the other, then fight against the one that oppresses until it returns to the ordinance of Allah. And if it returns, then make settlement between them in justice and act justly. Indeed Allah loves those who act justly’.

There are two important matters contained in this verse, al-Islah (reform) and al-‘Adl (justice). These two matters are very essential to maintain harmony and stability in social cohesion. Justice upheld and reform met will maintain a strong community bond and safeguard the honour and dignity of the Muslim ummah throughout the ages.

v) Unification of Society:

The objective of uniting society needs to be emphasised by the state leader as leadership is not considered complete if the process of unification is neglected. Allah urges in al-Quran that the ummah be united in holding to the rope (bond) of Allah and not to be fragmented, in surah Ali-Imran, 103: ‘And hold firmly to the rope of Allah (Islam) all together and do not become divided’.

To achieve this, a leader plays an essential role in containing society from divisive elements. Any issues have to be resolved promptly so that it does not become widespread within society. Stability ensures integrity and unity of a state. Without stability, there would be great difficulty in developing a state and implementing projects beneficial to the people.

Characteristics of Islamic Leadership:

Leadership based on al-Quran has the purpose of preserving the existence of society, maintaining, sustaining and implementing the objectives as well as serving the needs of individuals or society (Awang, 1976). Therefore, leaders need to possess certain leadership characteristics as explained in al-Quran as guidance for achieving the objectives outlined.

i) Submission to Allah:

Among the characteristics and ethics of Islamic leadership is to work with determination in devotion to Allah. Coming back to the notion of man as slave and viceroy of Allah on this earth, it is only appropriate that every aspect of leadership in Islam be based on personal submission to Allah. An Islamic leader would not lead his people to breach Allah’s Shariah and turn their backs on the Prophet’s Sunnah. Likewise with the followers, they would only give allegiance to a leader who truly qualifies according to Islam. Allah says in Surah al-Nisa’, 59: ‘O You who have believed! Obey Allah and obey the Messenger and those in authority among you’. The outcome of leadership oriented to submission to Allah is to be free from reprehensible matters such as being selfish, oppression, imbalance between affairs of the world and hereafter, and so on.

ii) Based on Syura (Consultation):
Syura or consultation is an important characteristic of Islamic leadership as the manifestation of justice, patience, sincerity, gentleness, open-mindedness and foresight. Syura becomes Sunnah practised by the Prophet (pbuh). It is said that the Prophet (pbuh) was a person who most consulted his Companions to seek their views.

The importance of Syura is that the principle of Syura cannot be separated from the concept of Islamic leadership. Al-Quran clearly states that a leader must implement consultation with people who have knowledge or people with good knowledge (expertise). Allah says in Surah al-Shura’, 38: ‘And those who have responded to their Lord and established prayer and whose affair is (determined) by consultation among themselves, and from what We have provided them, they spend’. Based on this verse, Syura is an ideal way to control the conduct of a leader. It avoids an egoistic attitude and does not neglect the given responsibility while all these are under Allah’s observation.

The Syura Council has a special task in an Islamic state to select candidates for the position of caliph. The council has the task of screening who among the candidates is more qualified to be appointed as caliph. If there are more than one candidates, then this matter is given to the Muslim ummah to affirm (Haji Daud, 1994). Further, the Syura Council is empowered to remove a caliph from his position should he fail to implement his duties as head of state or caliph.

Syura is the first principle in Islamic leadership, in addition to justice and freedom to express opinions. Al-Quran clearly states that Muslim leaders are obliged to hold consultations with knowledgeable persons or persons who give sound views. The implementation of syura makes possible for members of organisations in Islam to participate in the decision-making process. At the same time, syura functions as a place to oversee the conduct of a leader so as not to deviate from the geneal objectives of the congregation (council) (Altalib, 1992).

iii) Usrah Hasanah:

In Mu’jam al-Wasit, the word Usrah refers to Qudwah, exemplary noble quality. It can also be interpreted as an example or model worthy of emulation. The usrah characteristics are very important in a leader of a state. This is because such a character will ensure the effectiveness of governance, to preserve and realize justice and public interest. Hence, the outcome of usrah hasanah education is to produce an image of human civilization high in morals and values. Allah explicitly confirms in Surah al-Ahzab, 21: ‘There has certainly been for you in the Messenger of Allah an excellent pattern for anyone whose hope is in Allah and the Last Day and (who) remembers Allah often’.

This verse explains that to gain happiness and pleasure of Allah, the Prophet’s leadership should be made the role-model for the Muslim society. Ibn Kathir (1997) in his interpretation states that this verse is an important basis for emulating the Prophet (pbuh) in what he said (Aqwal), what he did (Af’al) and his condition (Ahwal). Thus, Allah commands us to emulate the Prophet’s patience during the Battle of Alzab and his condition and attitude of striving with hope of help from Allah. His praiseworthy qualities and noble character produced exemplary leadership, Qudwah hasanah or Usrah hasanah, for the universal human being (Andek Kelawa, 1999).

According to al-Quran the best Usrah is assessed based on a leader’s ability to guide men to the straight and righteous path. Good leadership also includes a noble character as in Allah’s praise for the Prophet’s (pbuh) character in al-Quran. Allah says in Surah al-Qalam, 4: ‘And indeed, you are of a great moral character’.

Thus it is clear that this characteristic is emphasised in Islam to ensure proper administration and governance of a state, and to be an accepted and respected leader of society. In addition, the characteristics of Islamic leadership should be acknowledged by all Muslims because these reflect harmony and good character which should be nurtured and appreciated by all levels of society.

Referring back to the Quranic verses abovementioned shows that Allah’s command to believers generally produces a sense of conscientious belief to emulate the Prophet’s quality of Usrah hasanah. In another verse, the Prophet (pbuh) is explained as the bearer of a Message guaranteed by Allah, and the requirement of loyalty to the Prophet (pbuh). Allah says in surah al-Nisa’, 80: ‘He who obeys the Messenger has obeyed Allah’. It is obligatory for a leader to be an exemplary role-model for the people in a variety ways. Character depends on words and deeds. The Prophet (pbuh) is truly the best example because he is the role-model for Muslims (Awang, 1976).

iv) Guided by al-Quran and al-Sunnah:

In state administration, Islam recommends that the best leadership is the main guideline based on al-Quran and al-Sunnah as Allah has laid down the criteria for leadership which we should observe. Among other things, Allah calls on us to lead towards goodness with wisdom. This is one of the methods employed by the Prophet (pbuh) (Mahyudin, 1996), as Allah says in Surah al-Nahl, 125: ‘Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good instruction, and argue with them in a way that is best. Indeed your Lord is most knowing of who has strayed from his way and he is most knowing of who is (rightly) guided’. 
In other verses, Allah calls on us to lead without indulging in our own desires. This is to avoid any probability of serving the self-interest, administering in an arbitrary manner because of vested interests, and so on. In Surah al-Jathiyyah, 23: Allah says: ‘Have you seen he who has taken as his god his (own) desire, and Allah has sent him astray due to knowledge and has set a seal upon his hearing and his heart and put over his vision a veil. So who will guide him after Allah? Then will you not be reminded?’

This characteristic of Islamic leadership is also explained by the Prophet (pbuh) in his saying, among others: ‘Allah loves a just ruler’. Further, ‘Allah loves most those who truly feel taqwa until they are not present, and it is not known where they have disappeared and even if they were present, they are not recognised. These are the ones who have received guidance and (any instructors of) knowledge’.

Based on these arguments, it can be concluded that al-Quran and al-Sunnah form the guidance or compass for a leader in state administration. This is essential because these two sources have been proven to be authentic and it therefore becomes a duty to acknowledge and implement them throughout the duration the responsibility is being held.

v) Capability:

The capability or qualification of a leader is important in Islamic leadership. The three aspects which ensure a capable leader are physical ability, spiritual elevation and exceptional mental ability. These three qualities blended well make a good leader. Allah says in Surah al-Muddathir, 2: ‘Arise and warn!’ The word Qum (arise) in this verse suggests strength. It might be a text which symbolises the need for strength to implement something. Within the concept of leadership, physical strength is essential as in good health and physical ability to lead. Likewise with spirituality, a leader is required to be highly spiritual. The truth of this is explained by Allah in surah al-Qalam, 4: ‘And indeed, you are of a great moral character’.

al-Quran has recommended that a leader has moral values and good conduct as shown by the Prophet (pbuh). These qualities are very essential as he is the role-model for society. In addition, a leader is required to have exceptional mental ability, such as a person with extensive and in-depth knowledge of administrative matters, open-mindedness and foresight. This is clearly explained in al-Quran, Surah Yusuf, 22: ‘And when Joseph reached maturity, We gave him judgment and knowledge. And thus We reward the doers of good’.

Based on this verse, Allah explains the attitude of Prophet Daud (David) (pbuh) who was endowed with knowledge and wisdom. Likewise in other verses, the readiness to face the probability of any future occurrence with resilience and calmness. In Surah Yusuf, 47: Allah says: ‘(Joseph) said, You will plant consecutively for seven years; and what you harvest leave in its spikes, except a little from which you will eat’.

Conclusion:

In ensuring the welfare and betterment of a society, institution or state, we need an authoritative and qualified leader as prescribed in Islam. The best leader qualified in all aspects would ensure a good society, institution or state. Islamic leadership as required by Islam is that which was shown by the Prophet (pbuh). His leadership is beyond compare in terms of trust and responsibility as a Prophet and Messenger of Allah, and encompasses all matters related to personal matters, military, politics, economics and so on. Thus it is only right for us to emulate all his styles of leadership and abide by the message brought to us for happiness in this life and hereafter. As Allah says in Surah al-Nisa’: 80: ‘He who obeys the Messenger has obeyed Allah’.

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References


