

Theocracy Breeds War

I believe that one of the principal causes of the world's dysfunctionality today is the total incompatibility of theocracy and the modern state.

But what do I mean by "theocracy"? According to the Encyclopaedia Britannica, Theocracy is government by officials who are regarded as "divinely guided." In many theocracies, government leaders are members of the clergy, and the state's legal system is based on religious law. Some contemporary examples of theocracies include Saudi Arabia, Iran, and the Vatican.*

The Enlightenment marked the end of theocracy in most Western countries, and challenged the religious source of legitimate rule. Democratic revolutions at and after that time, declared the will of the people to be the basic source of legitimacy. In most Western-style national states the power and authority of the churches waned or disappeared. In studying political modernization, Max Weber –among others– showed the difference between a traditional theocratic, and a legal-rational form of legitimate authority. Modern political thinkers diagnosed a great historical transformation from traditional to legal-rational types of legitimacy. *

Since the great upheavals of the French and American Revolutions of the 19th century, most international conflicts have revolved around the question of how best to achieve the legitimacy of popular rule, whether by parliamentary democracy or by different forms of collectivist rule as defined by a secular state. This modern paradigm of ideological conflict prevailed throughout the 20th century, as exemplified by the Cold War. However, in most non-Western nations –especially in Muslim nations– religion continued to play a fundamental role in government. They are, in effect, theocracies masquerading as "modern" states. I include Israel in this category.

Since the 1990's, this new paradigm has been defined by the thesis known as the "Clash of Civilizations." According to this thesis, people's cultural and religious identities are the primary source of conflict in the post-Cold War world. The American political scientist Samuel P. Huntington argued that future wars would be fought not between countries, but between cultures. It was proposed in a 1992 lecture at the American Enterprise Institute, which was then developed in a 1993 *Foreign Affairs* article titled "The Clash of Civilizations?" Huntington later expanded his thesis in his landmark 1996 book *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. **

It has become abundantly clear after the terrorist attacks on September 11th 2001, that Huntington's thesis was truly prophetic. Carried out by al-Qaeda, it's still not clear what country was the source of support for this movement –though its leader Osama bin Laden later chose the Pakistan-Afghanistan border region as his secret base of operations. The Islamist terrorist groups that have targeted Western nations since the 1990's have all received support from Muslim theocracies.

Since the start of the newest phase of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on October 7th 2023, the recurrent war that began in May 14th 1948 with the establishment of the modern state of Israel, has killed tens of thousands of civilians and involved many states, both in the Middle East and throughout the world. Various militant groups throughout the following decades have taken turns in claiming to represent the Palestinian people or to support their cause. The latest group wearing this mantle is Hamas –a Palestinian Sunni Islamist political and military organization governing the Gaza Strip. Other Islamist military groups have been involved in this never-ending conflict, such as the Houthis –an army of Yemeni Shi’ite rebels –and Hezbollah, both backed by Iran.

Returning now to my original premise, it is abundantly clear that as long as the state of Israel and its enemies continue to insist on grafting popular rule and theocracy onto their constitutions, no possible peace can incubate, but only a protracted Frankensteinian war.

* <https://www.britannica.com/topic/theocracy>

** https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clash_of_Civilizations

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