

## **The Sovereignty and Theo-democracy in Sayyid Abul-A'la Mawdudi's Thought**

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Research Article



### **Abstract**

The present study aims at investigating the sovereignty and Theo-democracy in Sayyid Abul-A'la Mawdudi's thought. The research method is descriptive-analytical and shows that Sayyid Abul-A'la Mawdudi has founded his political theory on the divine absolute sovereignty, but along with the divine absolute sovereignty, it tries to use mechanisms such as caliphate and council to fix the people's position in that theory. According to his theory, although sovereignty belongs specifically to God, the man can be enforcer of divine commands if he has the qualifications for divine caliphate. Accordingly, one cannot classify Mawdudi's theory merely under the theories pertaining to theocracy. Mawdudi who was attentive of this fact, fabricated the term theo-democracy in addition to using theocracy. Altogether, we can consider Mawdudi's view as the closest one to the Shiite view among the Sunnites' views. This is while in the position of comparison, Mawdudi has not remained faithful to his own theoretical foundations.

### **Keywords**

Sayyid Abul A'la Mawdudi, divine sovereignty, theocracy, theo-democracy, caliphate, council.

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**Introduction**

At the end of nineteenth century and the early years of twentieth century, the world observed the decline of colonialism in Islamic countries. However, the end of colonialism was not the beginning of growth and prosperity in the countries that had gained independence, and any country faced a lot of new problems and crises in view of its own conditions.<sup>1</sup> In that situation, the thinkers and intellectuals in the Islamic countries, in proportion to their view and belief, dealt with analysis and presentation of solutions for problems and crises in their countries or – in the major level – in the Islamic world. Some of the mechanisms had religious roots and some others originated from the communist east or liberal west.

Meanwhile, one of the most important Islamic centers of population and thought was the region of Indian subcontinent. That region, due to a large population on the one hand and the colonial presence of Great Britain as well as neighborhood to infidels (Hindus) on the other hand, was a center for Islamist and liberalist thoughts.

Sayyid Abul-A'la Mawdudi (1903-1979) is among the thinkers that theorized and sought for solution to the existing problems of the subcontinent in particular and the whole Islamic world in general. Before he – like many of his contemporaries – got inspired from the west or had a quite traditional and Salafi look at politics, he tried to get help from religious principles and make use of new political theories to offer a theory in line with today's world and at the same time Islamic in nature. Another feature of Mawdudi's political theory was its anti-west nature in a way that he considered the root for many of the problems in the Islamic world to be the dominance of the western culture and civilization on the Islamic lands. Of course,

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1. In addition to the decline of colonialism, the disintegration of Ottoman's caliphate in the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> decade of the last century made the Sunnite communities face with theoretical gap.

Mawdudi's theory is not a perfect and flawless theory, but it is true that it enjoys more strength and solidarity in comparison to many other theories.

The influence of Mawdudi's theory did not remain restricted in the geographical borders of the subcontinent and influenced the thoughts of many Islamist thinkers such as Sayyid Qutb, to the extent that western thinkers have considered him as one of the founders of Islamic fundamentalism and political Islam.<sup>1</sup> Of course, the importance of Mawdudi's political theory is doubled by the fact that he was not just a theorist; rather, he also played an important role in the world of politics and founded one of the greatest Islamic parties of the subcontinent called Islamic Community (*Jamā'at Islāmī*), a party active now in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.

In this study, we have tried to investigate and explain the most important pillar of Mawdudi's political theory, i.e. the concept of 'sovereignty' and, then, the theory of theo-democracy based on theological foundation of monotheism in sovereignty. The importance of this study is that two groups have been deviated due to misunderstanding of Mawdudi's concept of sovereignty. A group have indulged in violence due to their fanatic reading of Mawdudi's concept of sovereignty, and a group – mostly consisting of western thinkers and politicians – have considered him as the pioneer of fundamentalist thought.

### **Sovereignty**

As mentioned before, one of the key concepts in Mawdudi's thought is the concept of sovereignty. In the political thought, sovereignty is the most important pillar of political regime, and the political theories also seek to explain or justify the legitimacy of sovereignty in

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1. For example, see: Sayyid Vali Reza Nasr. *Mawdudi and the Making of Islamic Revivalism*.

societies.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, the identity of the societies depends on type of their sovereignty.<sup>2</sup>

The concept of sovereignty in Mawdudi's thought is rooted in monotheism in sovereignty.<sup>3</sup> Because of this, the highest power in the political regime in Mawdudi's view is 'sovereignty'. He defines sovereignty as follows: "sovereignty refers to the absolute dominance and the highest order of power; thus, the sovereignty of someone or a commission means that their decree or command serves as the law and they have the absolute authority and all-out unlimited dominance..." (Mawdudi, 1352 SH, pp. 55-56). In his view, "this is a perfect image of the legal sovereignty, and it will not be any less than this. However, this legal sovereignty will not be anything more than a theory or hypothesis until it relies on a real – or political – sovereignty that can put it in its true position" (Mawdudi, 1352 SH, p. 57).

He considers the realization of such a sovereignty in this world and among the human beings impossible; that is, there is no one in the world with such a full-scale sovereignty. Besides, in his view, none of the human beings can claim such a sovereignty. He believes that the man does not have the qualification for that position.

But why must the man not achieve that position? Mawdudi maintains that any man who gains such a power will be the source of oppression and corruption, that oppression and corruption will infiltrate into the society, and its results will reach the neighboring communities. Whenever human beings have gone towards such a

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1. For more information on the status of sovereignty in political regimes, see: Guglielmo, F. (1988). *Powior* (Trans. Agahi, A.). Tehran: Office of Political and International Studies.

2. Although the concept of sovereignty is a long lasting one, it was – in the modern age – explained by Locke, Hobbes, and Rousseau, and its basic importance was completely confirmed (see: 'Ameri, 1377 SH, pp. 224-235).

3. Mawdudi has explained, in detail, his political theory in various works including *Na'ariya al-Islām al-Siyāsiya*.

sovereignty, nothing has resulted for them except leaning towards oppression and corruption, because when the sovereignty is entrusted to someone who lacks the necessary qualifications, he has no such strong and authoritative spirit to use the powers of that sovereignty rightly. And this is what the Holy Quran has reminded in the following verse:

«وَمَنْ لَّمْ يُحْكَمْ بِمَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ فَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْفَاسِقُونَ»

“Those who do not judge by what Allah has sent down—it is they who are the transgressors.” (Mā’ida: 45; Mawdudi, 1352 SH, p. 60).

### The divine sovereignty

If no man has the right to sovereignty, who deserves it?

For Mawdudi, sovereignty belongs just to God, and it is God who must be the absolute sovereign, and no one is a partner to Him in this realm. It seems that in his view, monotheism in ownership is prior to other types of monotheism, and this type forms the foundation of his monotheistic system. This is while from the Salafi and Wahhabite viewpoints, monotheism in worshipping – with a deviated reading of it – is prior to other types of monotheism. To prove his theory, Mawdudi adduces the Quran’s verses:

«أَلَا لَهُ الْخَلْقُ وَالْأَمْرُ»

“Verily, All creation and command belong to Him.” (Arāf: 54; Mawdudi, 1352 SH, p. 60).

Mawdudi attempts to found the bases of his theory on the Quran’s verses so that he may not be the target of critiques pertaining to the situation of traditions in Islamic denominations. Accordingly, he proves sovereignty for God in several stages:

1. “God is the creator of the whole universe, the human being, and all phenomena that exist in the universe to be used by human beings.” (An’ām: 73; Ra’d: 16; Nisā: 1; Baqara: 29; Faṭir: 3; Wāqī’a: 58-79).

2. "The owner, the commander, the manager, the policymaker, and the organizer of that creation is also God" (Ṭāhā: 8; Rūm: 26; Arāf: 54; Sajda: 5).
3. "In the universe, there is no sovereignty except that of God, and there can be none except it; and no one has a right to regard a share for himself in it" (Baqara: 107; Furqān: 2; Qiṣaṣ: 70; An'ām: 57; Kahf: 26; Āl 'Imrān: 157; Rūm: 4; Ḥadīd: 5; Naḥl: 17; Ra'd: 16; Fāṭir: 40-41).
4. "All features and capacities necessary for sovereignty are concentrated in God's essence, and it is just God who enjoys them. . ." (An'ām: 18; Ra'd: 9; Ḥashr: 23; Baqara: 255; Mulk: 1; Yasīn: 83).

He maintains that the sphere of the divine sovereignty is absolute; that is, the divine sovereignty encapsulates all particles and creatures of the universe, including the human being, and it governs both the genetic and the legislation worlds (Mawdudi, 1405 AH, pp. 1-10).

It seems that, for Mawdudi, God's sovereignty means – in practice – the sovereignty of divine law, a law that he states in detail. That is, no law except God's law is to be obligatorily obeyed by human beings, and it is God's law that specifies the borders of human's individual and social life (Mawdudi, 1405 AH, p. 12). For him, God has stated His laws and orders in the form of the celestial books and scriptures the last of which is the Quran. Mawdudi says, "The only way to achieve divine laws is to obey the laws proclaimed by the Prophet. Besides, his actions and words are also in the position of divine laws. Thus, the Prophet is, in human's life, the representative of God's legal sovereignty. Thus, obeying the Prophet is the same as obeying God" (Mawdudi, 1405 AH, p. 20).

Mawdudi calls the divine law 'the Supreme Law' and explains it as follows: "That is, in those affairs that God and His messenger have stated something, no Muslim can interfere freely, and deviation from it opposes faith" (Mawdudi, 1405 AH, p. 22).

### The political sovereignty

After considering sovereignty as belonging specifically and absolutely to God, Mawdudi enters the realm of the man's political life. In his view, the political sovereignty also belongs to God, and no one except God is qualified for political sovereignty. Even people's choice does not lead to the ruler's legitimacy: "If someone sells himself contentedly to someone else, does the buyer achieve legal rights of ownership? If that consent does not lead to legal ownership, how does the consent of a nation, who have done that out of ignorance and unawareness, lead to sovereignty? The Quran has resolved this issue and stresses that no one's command except that of God is enforceable, and that right belongs just to Him, for only He is the creator of individuals. 'Verily, All creation and command belong to God'" (Mawdudi, 1352 SH, p. 59).

In answering the question of 'what will be the position of human governments and rulers?', Mawdudi says, "... any power that rises, with political force, to enforce the demands of divine sovereignty as the real sovereignty cannot be – legally and politically – considered the owner of sovereignty.... Because the force that lacks the legal sovereignty and a law or command in a higher position has limited his qualifications cannot be the bearer of sovereignty."

Such expressions and reading of the concept of sovereignty – whether in its political sense or its absolute sense – has caused many to consider Mawdudi as the reviver of Khawārij's view and as the supporter of religious despotism to the extent that they seek even the roots of the thoughts of Sayyid Qutb and fighting Salafis in Mawdudi's views.<sup>1</sup> For them, with the idea of God's absolute

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1. See for example: Muhammad Shahrur (1938-2019), *al-Dīn wal-Sulṭa: Qarāʾat Murāʾira lil-Ḥākimiyya*, pp. 41-53.

sovereignty, Mawdudi leaves no room for human's will and sovereignty in the sphere of social issues (ibid).

In this regard, we may say that the difference between the views of Sayyid Qutb and Mawdudi is that although Mawdudi, like Sayyid Qutb, maintains that sovereignty belongs exclusively to God, he has dealt, unlike Sayyid Qutb, in detail with the human's role.<sup>1</sup> According to him: "In the volitional parts of human's life, God has not dominated His sovereignty by force; rather, He has invited the man, through celestial books – of which the Quran is the last one – to accept, based on his consciousness and will, God's sovereignty and obey Him" (Mawdudi, 1405 AH, p. 11).

In other words, although the man has no role in legislation of sovereignty, he can implement the divine sovereignty on the earth through the mechanisms Mawdudi mentions.

After explaining his absolute view on sovereignty, Mawdudi presents his own mechanism for the man's presence in the realm of sovereignty with concepts such as caliphate and council.

### Caliphate

In Mawdudi's view, 'sovereignty' is essentially different from 'caliphate', for sovereignty belongs exclusively to God and cannot be entrusted to anyone else, while caliphate is some sort of representation and lieutenancy entrusted by God. Thus, he uses the term caliphate instead of sovereignty for human beings. He believes that in Islam,

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1. Mawdudi has borrowed the concept of ignorance from Sayyid Qutb. However, unlike him, Mawdudi regards ignorance active just in the western world. But Sayyid Qutb extended it to Islamic countries as well and issued the decree of Muslims' political excommunication. Mawdudi has explained the concept of ignorance in his book entitled *Islam and Ignorance*. Besides, for familiarity with the concept of ignorance in Sayyid Qutb's thought and that of other fanatic groups, see *Wārūnigī: Naqd wa Barrasī Mabānī Fikrī Jaryānhāyi Takfīrī bā Ta'kīd bar Dā'ish*.



whenever we speak of human government, we mean caliphate rather than sovereignty:

«وَعَدَ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مِنكُمْ وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ لَيَسْتَخْلِفَنَّهُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ كَمَا اسْتَخْلَفَ الَّذِينَ مِن قَبْلِهِمْ وَلَيُمَكِّنَنَّ لَهُمْ دِينَهُمُ الَّذِي ارْتَضَىٰ لَهُمْ وَلَيُبَدِّلَنَّهُم مِّن بَعْدِ خَوْفِهِمْ أَمْنًا يَعْبُدُونَنِي لَا يُشْرِكُونَ بِي شَيْئًا وَمَن كَفَرَ بَعْدَ ذَلِكَ فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْفَاسِقُونَ».

“Allah has promised those of you who have faith and do righteous deeds that He will surely make them successors in the earth, just as He made those who were before them successors; and He will surely establish for them their religion which He has approved for them; and that He will surely change their state to security after their fear, while they worship Me, not ascribing any partners to Me. Whoever is ungrateful after that—it is they who are the transgressors” (Nūr: 55)

By referring to this glorified verse, he refers to two points: first, he uses the word *caliphate* instead of *government*, because according to Islam, sovereignty belongs to God, and anyone who possesses power and ruling will be, based on divine law, undoubtedly the caliph (i.e. the deputy) of the supreme ruler, that is God. Thus, he will not have the permission to exert any power except what has been entrusted to him... (Mawdudi, n.d., p. 40).

In Mawdudi’s view, caliphate is “the real form of human ruling based on the Quran” (Mawdudi, 1405 AH, p. 23). Accordingly, the legitimate caliphate is the caliphate recognized based on the law enacted by God and His Prophet and the legitimate caliph is the one who accepts the responsibility of caliphate under the management of the true ruler. (Mawdudi, 1405 AH, p. 24).

### The general caliphate

The second point he uses from the aforementioned verse is the general

caliphate. That is, the caliphate is the right of any human being who enjoys the qualifications asserted in that verse:

“The power and ruling on the earth is the promise given to the nation of believers and there is no mention of the provision that a certain person must reach that position. From this, we conclude that all believers deserve to be caliph. The caliphate entrusted to a believer by God is the general lieutenancy and is not specified to any given family, class or race. Any believer is a caliph for God in proportion to his own individual capacity, and it is based on this position that he is personally responsible before God” (Mawdudi, 1352 SH, p. 41).

However, what is the result of proving this general lieutenancy for all Muslims in Mawdudi's view?

1. In a society wherein all individuals are caliphs and have equal rights to participate in caliphate, there will be no division in class, blood and social status. In such a society, all individuals enjoy equal status and conditions. In such a social order, the only criterion for supremacy over others is the individual capacity and personality, and this is what the Prophet has stated frequently and clearly. No one has superiority over others, except for his faith and piety.
2. In such a society, all individuals can achieve, in view of their capacities and potentials, any status, and they all enjoy equal opportunities for progress.
3. In such a society, there is no room for dictatorship of an individual or a group, because in that society, anyone is himself a caliph. None of the individuals or groups has the right to become an absolute ruler in his realm of caliphate by depriving individuals, including nobles or ordinary people. The status of the individual who is selected for government is nothing more than the one to whom all Muslims have entrusted caliphate for

managing the society. In such a society, any intelligible and mature Muslim, whether a woman or a man, has voice and the right to express his opinions, for each of them is a deposit for caliphate (Mawdudi, 1352 SH, pp. 41-42).

As we see, Mawdudi's thought is opposed to the old theory of caliphate that regards being from Quraysh tribe as a prerequisite for caliphate based on the tradition saying, '*al-a'imma min Quraysh*' (i.e. the imams are from Quraysh). Individuals such as Mavardi (Mavardi, 1406 AH, p. 6) and Khunji considered being from Quraysh as one of the basic qualifications for caliphate. Regarding the qualifications of the caliph, Khunji says, "First, he must be from Quraysh, for the Prophet has said, 'imams are from Quraysh'" (Khunji, 1362 SH, p. 78). Even in new opinions, persons such as Rashid Reza – from the pioneers of the new caliphate – stress on the caliph's being from Quraysh, except in emergency conditions (Rashid Reza, n.d., pp. 59-64, 73).<sup>1</sup> On the contrary, Mawdudi writes – in an analysis of Abu Hanifa's view – on the caliph's being from Quraysh as a prerequisite:

"The reason was not that the Islamic caliphate was, in *Shari'a*, the right of a certain tribe or clan; rather, its true reason was the conditions of those days that due to mobilization of people, the caliph had to be chosen from among the members of Quraysh. Ibn Khaldun has stated quite clearly that in those days, the adherents of the Islamic caliphate were just Arabs, and Arabs had consensus on the caliphate of Quraysh members; and if anyone else was chosen, it would arise schism and struggle, putting the Islamic regime in danger. Thus, the Prophet ordered

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1. Among the contemporary thinkers, Ahmad Reza Khan Brilavi – the founder of Brilavi school – did not recognize even the caliphate of Uthman, because he considered imamate only in the hands of Quraysh. He composed a treatise in this regard, See: Ahmad Reza Khan Brilavi, *Dawām al-Aysh min al-A'imma min Quraysh*.

that imam must be from Quraysh. But if that position was legally forbidden for non-Quraysh individuals, how did 'Umar say – when he was dying – if Salim, Abu Huzayfa's freed slave, was alive, I would choose him to be my successor?" (Mawdudi, 1405 AH, pp. 310-311).

This view stated by Mawdudi separates his theory from those of others such as Kharijites, Sayyid Qutb, and even the Salafi and Takfiri movements, making it near to the modern political theories.

According to Mawdudi, that fact that caliphate is not the right of a certain person or a certain class causes the Islamic caliphate to be separated from kingdom, class ruling and the ruling of religious leaders, going towards republicanism (Mawdudi, 1405 AH, p. 27).

### **The characteristics of the caliph<sup>1</sup>**

After Mawdudi explains the difference between sovereignty and caliphate and considers caliphate as belonging to human beings, he enumerates some characteristics for the caliph (Islamic ruler) by adducing the Quranic verses (Mawdudi, 1405 AH, pp. 22-23).

Accordingly, the statesmen must believe in some principles and rules on which the caliphate has been founded, because the responsibility of administering a system cannot be entrusted to someone who does not accept it (Nisā: 59; Āl 'Imrān: 118; Towba: 16). The caliphs must not be oppressors, evildoer and perverse, negligent of God or transgressor (Baqara: 124; Šād: 28; Kahf: 28; Shu'arā: 151-152; Hujurat: 13). Besides, the caliphs must not be ignorant; rather, they must be knowledgeable and enjoy intellectual and physical capacity in enforcing the duties pertaining to caliphate (Nisā: 5; Baqara: 247; Šād: 20; Yūsuf: 55; Nisā: 83; Zumar: 9; Nisā: 58).

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1. Here, the word caliph is not used in its common sense; rather, it means the Islamic ruler, and Mawdudi uses the word caliph not to be mixed with the concepts of sovereignty and caliphate.

## Council

If one can divide the Sunnite' political theories into two types, i.e. caliph-centered and council-centered, Mawdudi falls under the latter types. This is because 'council' has a central role in Mawdudi's thought. Accordingly, Mawdudi believes that the government, in the political system of Islam, must further its affairs through council. Like other council-centered thinkers, he adduces the Quran's verses:

«وَأْمُرُهُمْ شُورَىٰ بَيْنَهُمْ»

“and [conduct] their affairs by counsel among themselves”

(Shūrā: 38).

«وَشَاوِرْهُمْ فِي الْأَمْرِ»

“and consult them in the affairs” (Āl ʿImrān: 159).

Then, he transmits from Imam Ali and other caliphs some traditions quoting the Prophet as saying, “If no decree from the Quran and the Sunnah was found on something, form a council about it” (Mawdudi, 1405 AH, pp. 69-70).

He believes that today's National Council is the very assembly of *Ahl Ḥill wa ʿAqd* (i.e. prominent members of the community) that existed in the early years of Islam (Mawdudi, 1352 SH, p. 70). In a historical investigation, he shows that the caliphs administered their government through council and were committed to counselling in important affairs.<sup>1</sup>

“The orthodox caliphs' view on counselling was that the members of council had the right to express their opinions freely” (Mawdudi, 1405 AH, p. 91). In explaining the qualifications of the members of the council, Mawdudi refers to attributes such as knowledge, piety, religiosity, rightness of opinion and complete freedom in expressing

1. Of course, there are ambiguities on how much the caliphs were committed to counselling and would do their affairs based on counselling, which we mentioned in previous sections.

their opinions. The prominent members of the community are a group whom all people trust and know that they do not deviate the government.

In his historical investigation, Mawdudi maintains that one of the problems of turning caliphate to kingdom is the end of council administration, and believes that after the orthodox caliphs and beginning of the era of kingdom, the council was replaced by despotism. The king would escape from the righteous people and they would escape from the king.

The consequence of this situation was doing the affairs in opposition to Islamic orders. The individuals who were consulted lacked the necessary qualifications and the non-Islamic laws gradually replaced the Islamic laws, and people would see kings as evildoers and corrupted persons. To compensate that problem, the scholars issued fatwas based on their individual understanding and their own legal reasoning (*ijtihad*), and this created an anarchist milieu in the Islamic society. In other words, there was no single decree originated from the opinions of the prominent members of the community to be resorted by all. Rather, there were diverse, and even contrasting, decrees (Mawdudi, 1405 AH, pp. 203-204).

But the theory of council has a basic condition as follows: "There can never be a law opposing God's Book and the Prophet's sayings, even though there may be a consensus" (Mawdudi, 1352 SH, p. 70). As mentioned before, from Mawdudi's opinions on sovereignty, caliphate, and divine laws, it may seem that the council he meant was not an efficient one. But he himself states the duty of the council as follows:

1. Although the council cannot make any change in God's explicit laws, it is its duty to enact laws and commands for implementing those laws.
2. In issues wherein divine laws are not clear and can be

interpreted, they must be proposed in the assembly to choose the interpretation closest to the spirit of law. Thus, the scholars, who are qualified to interpret the laws, must be present in the assembly. Otherwise, it is possible that the deviated readings of divine laws are presented. And of course, this is related to the cleverness and skillfulness as well as the good choice of those who choose the representatives.

3. As to the issues about which there is no religious law, the assembly can accept one of the general rules of jurisprudence or, considering the general religious rules, enact a special law for them.
4. And finally, as to those issues for which there is no general rule in jurisprudence, which means that God has entrusted the right to legislate to human beings, it must enact laws consistent with the interests of the nation; of course as long as it does not conflict with the general religious rules (Mawdudi, 1352 SH, pp. 71-72).

Mawdudi also offers the mechanism of choosing the members of the council and even believes that, early in Islam, the caliphs would choose the prominent members of the community (*Ahl Ḥill wa 'Aqd*) through election. However, the method of their choosing was different from our methods in view of the conditions of today's society (Mawdudi, 1352 SH, p. 108). He believes that even before the Prophet's migration, two groups of people found the membership of the Counselling Assembly: "(1) those who had converted to Islam in early stages and were close to the Prophet; and (2) those who had gotten experiences due to next difficulties. These two groups were both trustable for all Muslims and the Prophet paid special attention to them" (Mawdudi, 1352 SH, p. 109).

But when the Prophet migrated to Medina, the conditions changed and the Islamic society expanded much and two groups become privileged among the people: "(1) those who did crucial political and

military as well as propagative tasks; and (2) those who had become famous for their understanding and knowledge of the Quran and the religious issues, in a way that ordinary people would refer to them for religious affairs after the Prophet's departure" (Mawdudi, 1352 SH, pp. 110-111).

Mawdudi believed that although there was no formal elections, people had an unsaid consensus on those individuals, and if there was an election, the same individuals with the same characteristics would be chosen (ibid).

He then extends that situation to the time of the caliphs and considers the era under them as the era of consultative government. Then, he maintains that such mechanisms and criteria impossible for the present time. Thus, he accepts the common methods of referendum and voting for choosing the members of council (representatives) with two provisions: (1) there is no religious forbiddance for the candidates; and (2) it leads to the choice of individuals trustable for people, and there must be no trickery in it (Mawdudi, 1352 SH, pp. 110-115). Elsewhere, he maintains that the individuals who are interested in power and representation are not suitable for those offices (ibid).

### **The Islamic theo-democracy**

Considering the position of sovereignty, caliphate and council, as well as verses Mawdudi mentions for proving his views, it seems that his thought is proposed in the form of theocracy. That is, it has a quite divine origin and sovereignty is also absolutely in God's hands. This is because many critics of Mawdudi's thought, whether Muslim or non-Muslim, have had such a reading of Mawdudi's sayings, and that reading is one of the reasons why they have introduced him as a fundamentalist.

According to Muhammad 'Ammara: "in our time, the doubt cast by Khawārij (the divine absolute sovereignty) has gained a position



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among people, especially among some petrified and reactionary individuals who have taken some phrases from writings of Abul-A'la Mawdudi whose letters and appearance negates the human's sovereignty and proves the conflict between God's sovereignty and human's sovereignty as well as the rejection of the assumption that human's caliphate is a type of sovereignty in the affairs related to legal reasoning. These extremists have extracted Mawdudi's statements from their general context, and have neglected ample of his other statements that express his thought in this regard" (Ammara, 1376 SH, p. 58).

As Ammara has pointed out rightly, for Mawdudi, the divine sovereignty does not mean lack of legitimacy of human governments. Rather, if the human governments rule according to the divine laws, they will be legitimate in his view. Accordingly, he is one of the founders of the idea of creating the Islamic government. Thus, the meaning of Mawdudi's idea of divine sovereignty is the essential sovereignty. That is, the Exalted God's sovereignty is an essential and absolute sovereignty due to His power of creation and management, while the human's sovereignty or creation is not absolute, but is accidental and must be confirmed by God.

According to him, the human (worldly) sovereignty belongs to humans, because this is what God's caliphate and succession necessitate. This is what Mawdudi means when he says, 'only the Exalted God is the sovereign. He is the absolute ruler in essence and in principle, and others' sovereignty can be relegated and entrusted to them'" (Mawdudi, 1977, p. 82).

As the above statements show, Mawdudi distinguishes the divine essential sovereignty and the grantable (accidental) sovereignty. Apart from what we can get from Mawdudi's thought, he himself has referred, in his *The Political Theory of Islam*, to the type and the

nature of the political system he has in mind. After explaining his political theory, he says:

“From what was mentioned, it is clarified that Islam is not a democratic system, because democracy is a name for a certain form of government wherein the governance belongs finally to people. There, the enactment of laws, whether in form or in content, relies on the public force and belief, and the laws are modified to conform to the changes in the public beliefs... In Islam, there is no such a situation and, thus, it cannot be called a democratic system” (Mawdudi, n.d., p. 28).

He acknowledges that with the features he enumerates for the government, he makes it close to the type of theocracy: “The name more proper for it is God’s government, which is called in Latin ‘theocracy’” (Mawdudi, n.d., p. 28).

The western theocracy or God’s government, in west, has features whose most important one, for Mawdudi, is the existence of a special class called priests as representatives of God on the earth. He believes that in the west, the divine government is synonymous with the priests’ government. They impose their wishes as God’s wishes on people, and display their own laws as God’s laws. That type of government must be called evil government, not divine government (Asgarali, 2006, p. 163). Of course, the Islamic regime is not [like] the European theocracy wherein a class (priests) pretend to be God (Mawdudi, n.d., p. 28).

Elsewhere, he says:

“You may not transit from the term ‘lieutenancy’ to the terms referring to offices such as ‘*dillulāh*’ (God’s shadow) or ‘intercession between people and God’ or ‘the rights of divine kings’ and think that Islam has made some persons dominant over people with those titles. The Quran decrees that this office – lieutenancy and caliphate – is not related only to one

individual or a certain class or family; rather, it is a right for all those who accept God's sovereignty and the supremacy of divine law transmitted to us by the prophet and messengers" (Mawdudi, n.d., p. 65).

He then defines the theocracy in his view as follows:

"... in the Islamic theocracy, no certain class rules; rather, the whole society of the Muslims, whether young or old, have a share in it. The whole Muslim nation administer the government on the basis of God's Book and the Prophet's Sunnah. If I was allowed to create a new term, I would call that administrative system 'theo-democracy' or God's ruling over people or, in other words, the divine democratic government, because in that government, in that government, people have been granted a limited general sovereignty under God's supervision. The executive power in that administrative system is formed through the will of all Muslims who have the right to depose it as well. All issues related to the quality of administering of the government and issues on whom there is no explicit divine law will be resolved through consensus among Muslims. That is, any Muslim who enjoyed a more complete power of judgment and have a more perfect knowledge of Islamic principles is allowed to interpret the divine law as time necessitates" (Mawdudi, n.d., pp. 28-29).

Can we choose a new name for Mawdudi's idea – as he himself states – including 'Islamic theocracy', 'theo-democracy' or 'the divine democratic government'? Although Mawdudi has referred to the legitimacy of human's government and his limited and longitudinal sovereignty along with concepts such as divine sovereignty, human's caliphate, and divine law, some parts of his political thought regarding the type and form of his favorite political system seems vague. In other words, presenting a theory like theo-democracy, which carries in

it conflicts and inconsistencies, needs more theorization and does not fit in generalities. If Mawdudi's theocracy is not the same as the western theocracy, how can all Muslims participate in the government? On the other hand, making the government contingent upon divine laws requires a group of persons who are quite familiar with religious laws and doctrines and play the role of leadership for the people. The idea that all Muslims are equally qualified for leadership and caliphate, as stated in the idea of general caliphate, is in conflict with the features of Islamic government that must be quite in line with *Shari'a* and must not have the form of western democracy.

But on the whole, the composition of theocracy and democracy is among Mawdudi's innovations and need more theorization and exploration.

### **Shiism and Mawdudi's theory**

It seems that Mawdudi approaches the Shiite theory in the concept of sovereignty and his perception of it. Firstly, the Shiites also consider no one except God as deserving sovereignty over humans. This is because just as Mawdudi argues that merely God knows the human's advantages and disadvantages as well as his past and future, the Shiites also consider God as the absolute sovereign. The method of argument for the Prophet's sovereignty is also the same. The Prophet's legitimacy, in Mawdudi's view, is merely due to his lieutenancy and mission from God. That is, he is the agent with a mission to proclaim God's message, for he states the divine law for the human beings and finds the legitimacy for governing the humans. Otherwise, he does not deserve to govern the humans. The Shiites also have the same argument. But the Shiites, after the Prophet, consider sovereignty – due to its importance – as belonging to God's special representatives, with permission from Him, whom the Prophet have appointed personally. The reasons the Shiites present for the necessity

of the doctrine of imamate are the very reasons presented for the existence of the Prophet.

Although Mawdudi apparently extends the circle of those who deserve caliphate, he approaches practically and in an unspoken form to the Shiite theory, because in his view, those who have exclusively the right to caliphate and even the presence in the related council are the ones who are more knowledgeable in divine commands and laws. Not anyone has legitimacy for caliphate just because of being a Muslim or living in the Islamic land. However, Mawdudi, due to being affiliated with the Sunnites, walks in the same path.

Similarly, what has caused Mawdudi not to consider caliphate just in the hands of Quraysh is the unwelcome situation that came to Islam due to the tribalism and ethnic nationalism under Uthman, Mo'awiya and Omawid and Abbasid dynasties. He believes that Uthman's nepotism and Mo'awiya's making caliphate hereditary dealt the most severe blows to Islam.<sup>1</sup> While Mawdudi maintains that the deviation of caliphate started from the time of Uthman, the Shiites regard the decisions made at Saqifa as the origins for those deviations. It seems that the Shiite view is more consistent, theoretically, with Mawdudi's view on the high position of caliphate as lieutenancy of God. And if Mawdudi has accepted the theory of elective caliphate, he has tried not to breach the Sunnites' consensus. Nevertheless, with critique of many companions of the Prophet in Mawdudi's view, their absolute justice is also challenged.<sup>2</sup> Thus, if the position of caliphate and imamate is so important that a person in those positions must implement all divine laws exactly, who can enjoy those positions better than the ones with impeccability and divine knowledge? In practice, as Mawdudid himself has well pointed out, those who unduly

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1. He analyzes those conditions in detail in his book entitled *Khilāfat wa Mulūkiyyat*.

2. See: Mawdudi, *Khilāfat wa Mulūkiyyat*.

sat on the throne of caliphate were certainly the ones who did not deserve that position and ruined the Islamic society.

Altogether, although Mawdudi, in the position of theorization, approach Shiism, he gets away from the content of his own theory in adjusting and presenting historical evidence.<sup>1</sup> Thus, we can say that Mawdudi's theory on sovereignty, caliphate, council and theo-democracy in the theoretical sphere is a reading close to Shiism among the Sunnites.

### Conclusion

The most important pillar of Mawdudi's political thought is the concept of divine sovereignty, in a way that one can say in discussions on monotheism, the monotheism in sovereignty is more important for him than other aspects of monotheism. Mawdudi considers God as the absolute sovereign, and he considers sovereignty for no one in no sphere – including the spheres of society and politics – except for God. He distances himself from groups such as Khawārij and Sayyid Qutb as well as Salafi and Jihadi movements in concepts such as caliphate and council, and considers caliphate as a right for all Muslims. The only difference is that God's sovereignty is essential and the humans' caliphate is accidental and bestowed by God. He enumerates some features for it that are present in a few Muslims in each era. The position of divine sovereignty and the characteristics he enumerates for divine caliph are automatically reminiscent of the Shiite theory of imamate. The only difference is that he gets into contradiction in conforming his theory with Islam and is forced to move according to the Sunnite consensus. However, he – unlike the Sunnites – criticizes the behaviors and characters of some of the

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1. Of course, we can find some consistencies between Mawdudi's thought and the Shiite thought under the Occultation Period, which cannot be discussed here.

Prophet's companions. Finally, Mawdudi uses the term theocracy to reconcile the divine sovereignty with the people's role as originated from the new political theories. That term – in spite of Mawdudi's explanations – remain contradictory and need elaboration and explanation. From Mawdudi's admonitions on misunderstandings of that term, it seems that he himself was also in doubt in using that term.

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