

TADBĪR AS KEY ELEMENT OF LEADERSHIP IN ISLAM

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Despite a number of works on leadership in Islam in the modern era, due attention has not been given to its semantic-conceptual framework which is so crucial in forming and nurturing a proper mindset in understanding it correctly as well as exemplifying it in any particular domain of application. Inspired by the intellectual framework and methodology of Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, particularly regarding the crucial role of key terms in not only projecting but also preserving the Worldview of Islam in the Muslim minds, this paper shall try to address such an intellectual lacuna in two parts. The first part of this paper is a preliminary attempt at offering the aforesaid framework, an attempt which stems from our analysis of numerous key terms which have been employed not only in the Qur'an and the Prophetic traditions but also throughout the different epochs of the Islamic Civilisation. A distinctive feature of such a framework is a conceptual structure that shall enable us to not only differentiate between constituting elements of leadership, on the one hand, and indispensable traits of a good leader, on the other hand, but also relate those elements and traits in a significant way. However, given the time-and-space constraint, as well as based on our perusal of authoritative lexicons of the Arabic language, our paper shall, in its second part, focus on *tadbīr*—a key term that acts as a conceptual pivot for such other leadership-and-governance-related terms as *ri'āyah*, *siyāsah* and *idārah*, and constitutes the centre of their semantic field.

PART ONE: ELEMENTS OF LEADERSHIP*

It can be justifiably claimed that no person with sound reason would dare deny the significance of leaders and leadership. Indeed, as long as there are communities of humans, leaders are indispensable. The importance of leaders and leadership, especially those occupying the highest position in regard to the Ummah, has been clearly affirmed in the authoritative works on Islamic creeds, particularly the ones

* Part One of this paper was originally a keynote address, in Malay, at Seminar “Kepimpinan dan Pemikiran Strategik: Amalan Terbaik dan Model Gemilang Islam (Leadership and Strategic Thinking: Islamic Best Practices and Excellent Models),” organised by the Institute of Islamic Understanding Malaysia (IKIM), on 20th September 2017, which will soon become a chapter in *Islam, Kepimpinan dan Strategi* (Islam, Leadership and Strategy), ed. Mohd Sani bin Badron (Kuala Lumpur: IKIM, forthcoming 2025). Content-wise, it is a continuation of Chapter 1, pp. 1–8, by the author in a work titled *Kepimpinan dan Amanat Peradaban* (Leadership and Civilisational Trust), ed. Mohd Sani Badron and Nor Hartini Saari (Kuala Lumpur: IKIM, 2016), as well as an extension of the author’s observation on the importance of in-depth analysis of the semantic field of a cluster of key terms related to leadership and governance in the Islamic Tradition such as: *imāmah*, *sultān*, *mulk*, *imārah*, *ri'āyah*, *khilāfah*, *tadbīr*, *siyāsah*, *ḥukūmah*, *wilāyah*, *wizārah*, and *idārah*. See the author’s note on page 31 in his work “Conceptualizing *Tadbīr* as a Constituent of Governance in Islām,” *TAFHIM: IKIM Journal of Islam and the Contemporary World* 3 (2010): 27–47.

formulated, articulated and established as *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah*.¹ So significant is the position and role of leaders and leadership among the Ummah that Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, in his detailed analysis of the dilemma of the Ummah, regards “false leadership” as constitutive of the vicious circle that has been besetting the Ummah.²

As a solution to the aforementioned quagmire, al-Attas emphasises the inculcation and nurturing of *adab* as imbued by true knowledge and understanding.³ In line with the remedy offered by him, a necessary step to avoid such a dire situation from worsening involves the Ummah coming to know and understand the kind of leaders they are to identify and select. It is here that it becomes crucial for those responsible for the identification and selection or appointment of leaders to be fully aware of the difference, as well as the relation, between the fundamental elements of leadership, on the one hand, and the qualities or character of a good leader, on the other hand. While being dissimilar, both categories must be treated in tandem in any sincere and serious attempt to install true leaders in their rightful positions. The ground for such categorical disparity stems from several indications in the Qur'an pertaining to paired terms whose meanings are differentiated yet mutually related, particularly in *sūrat al-Qaṣaṣ*, 28: 26 and *sūrat al-Naml*, 27: 39. We could infer from the two verses that the term *qawīyy* therein denotes *quwwah* in the sense of the inherent potential of a person, a sense so vital in shedding light on the intended meaning of its opposite—*da'if*—as employed by the Prophet in his advice to Abū Dhar to connote “lack of the inherent potential,” instead of “weakness” in the general sense.⁴

In other words, by elements of leadership are meant constituents that define who or what a leader is and hence distinguish leaders from followers or those being led. Hence, such elements are to be differentiated from the qualities or traits of a good leader because more often than not such qualities as trustworthiness (*amānah*) and truthfulness (*ṣidq*) are required of not only leaders but also disciples. A plausible analogy to distinguish leadership constituents from leadership qualities would be “water.” Water, in terms of the chemical elements that constitute it, is H₂O whereas in terms of its qualities as appeared to our senses, is transparent, tasteless or fresh, and other such properties.

In conceptually outlining the constitutive elements of leadership, the approach adopted is semantic analysis of key terms which are frequently found in the Holy Qur'an, the Prophetic Traditions and major religious and intellectual works of the Islamic Civilisation.⁵ This approach is based on three grounds: (1) the significance of

¹ See for example Sa'd al-Dīn al-Taftāzānī, *Sharḥ al-'Aqā'id al-Nasafīyyah*, ed. Aḥmad Ḥijāzī al-Saqqa (Kaherah: Maktabat al-Kullīyyāt al-Azhariyyah, 1987), 96ff..

² Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Islām and Secularism* (Kuala Lumpur: Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia (ABIM), 1978), 99ff..

³ Al-Attas, *Islām and Secularism*, 100.

⁴ See *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Book 33 (*Kitāb al-Imārah*), ḥadīth no. 19, as in <https://sunnah.com/muslim:1825> (accessed 20th January 2025).

⁵ Such works as Abū al-Qāsim al-Ḥusayn b. Muḥammad (known as al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī) (d. 503H.), *Al-Mufradāt fī Ghariḥ al-Qur'ān*, 2 vols. (n.p.: Maktabat Nazar Mustafa al-Baz, n.y.); Majd al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Ya'qūb al-Fayrūzābādī (d. 817H.), *Baṣā'ir Dhawī al-Tamyīz fī Laṭā'if al-Kitāb al-'Azīz*, ed. Muḥammad 'Alī al-Najjār, 6 vols. (Beirut: Al-Maktabah al-'Ilmiyyah, n.y.); Edward William

names and naming in the process of knowing, as emphasised by the Holy Qur'ān;⁶ (2) the Qur'ānic reminder regarding corruption of religious teachings and understanding as a result of changes in words vis-à-vis meanings;⁷ and (3) the conviction that the Arabic language as the medium of the Final Revelation is a precise scientific language.⁸ The aforementioned terms as well as the meanings they convey, when analysed in the context of the essential make-up of a leader, could be grouped into certain categories or layers (such as core and derivative meanings) which form a network of semantic relations, projecting a particular conception of leadership. Altogether, there are no less than 17 terms which could be grouped into three major categories or layers.⁹

Categories of Terms and Layers of Constituents

First Category

Term	Constituent
1) <i>Imāmah; imām</i>	1) Exemplary (words and deeds) and model; in the front line, pioneer, forerunner; leader in pursuit of certain goals; source-origin as foundation or basis or anchor
2) <i>Imārah; amīr</i> ❖ <i>Ulu al-amr</i> ❖ <i>Amīr al-mu'minīn</i>	2) Ruler; director, a guide who drives; employing consultation and <i>mushāwarah</i>
3) <i>Riyāṣah; ra'īs</i>	3) Head; the highest level

Lane, *An Arabic–English Lexicon*, 8 vols. (London & Edinburgh: Williams and Norgate, 1863); George Percy Badger, *An English–Arabic Lexicon* (Beirut: Librairie du Liban, 1980; reprint, 1988); and David B. Burrell and Nazih Daher (translator), *The Ninety-Nine Beautiful Names of God* (Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 1995). Apart from this present work of ours, two works are worth mentioning. One is a work by 'Abd ALI'āh 'Uthmān 'Alī al-Manṣūrī, entitled *Muṣṭalahāt al-Qiyādah fī al-Qur'ān wa al-Sunnah* (n.p.: Mu'assasat al-Naba' al-'Azīm, n.y.) while another one is an earlier work by Moneim El-Meligi who attempted to semantically compare a number of terms related to leader and leadership in a few major languages of the world, i.e., *Leading Starts in the Mind: A Humanistic View of Leadership* (Singapore: World Scientific, 2005; reprint 2006), in a chapter entitled "Leadership Semantics: Cross-Cultural Exploration," p. 31–40. Nonetheless, his final conclusion, especially the ones related to word functions, differs from what is here outlined by us.

⁶ *Sūrat al-Baqarah*, 2: 31.

⁷ *Sūrat al-Nisā'*, 4: 46; and *al-Mā'idah*, 5: 13 and 41.

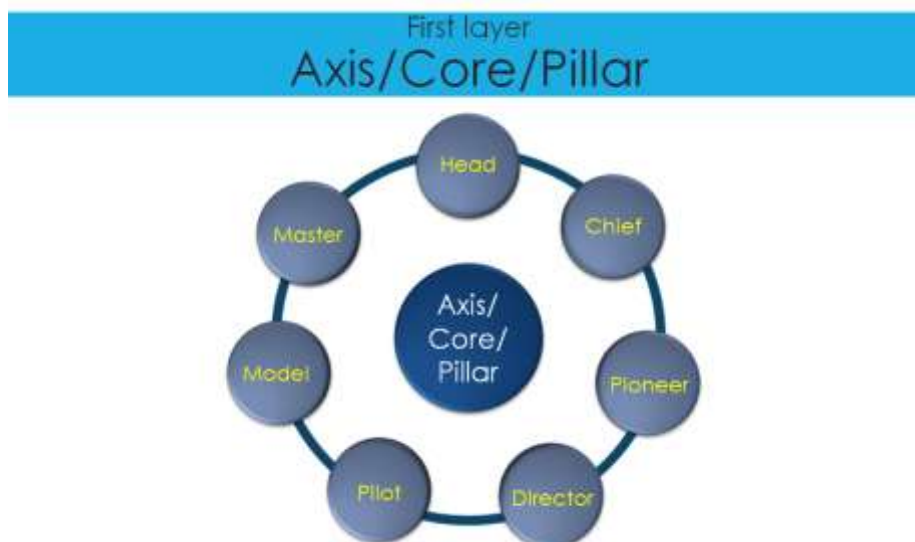
⁸ Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *The Concept of Education in Islām: A Framework for an Islamic Philosophy of Education* (Kuala Lumpur: Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia (ABIM), 1980), 1–6.

⁹ Other related terms which are not suitable to be grouped under the three categories are: *wizārah* and *wazīr* (bearer of responsibilities, bearer of duties, the ruler's assistant [minister]; protector; sin); *za'āmah* and *za'im* (guarantor, bearer; test); and *mala'* (dignitary, leader, the rich [the wealthy]). The terms *wizārah* and *wazīr* can be understood as depicting the other faces of a leader while *za'āmah*, *za'im* and *mala'*, especially in the Holy Qur'ān, contains negative meanings related to leadership.

4) <i>Siyādah; sayyid</i>	4) Lord/master
5) <i>Qiyādah; qā'id</i>	5) Pilot, general, guardian; advancing forward
6) <i>Shaykh</i>	6) Chief (based on rich experience associated with long life)

The First Category contains six terms which encapsulate pillars or axis of leadership. Leaders are those who are exemplary, especially in words and deeds, being not only positioned at the forefront but also advancing as pioneer, forerunner or discoverer. Due to this, leaders are considered to be the source-origin, becoming a foundation or basis or anchor of something and also pointing towards a certain direction for a serious pursuit. As such, they are pilots or generals, capable of directing those who obey their orders while guiding and driving them towards their goals. They act as heads, and being at the top, possess a broad outlook or horizon. In fact, those who possess broader and far-sighted vision should be designated as the head. Leaders act as master or lord, especially if a call for obedience is demanded. They become chiefs on the basis of rich experience due to longer life. They perform consultation and *mushāwarah* in leadership as indicated by the essential meaning of *mu'tamar*. In short, although there are altogether six key terms, the essential, constitutive elements of leadership which they denote are seven as enlisted in Diagram 1 below, thus forming the First Category.

DIAGRAM 1



Nevertheless, it is important to emphasise that different from the term *amīr*, the term *imām* can be used to refer to true scholars (*‘ulamā’*). Such usage clearly indicates

that true knowledge is characteristic of a real scholar who is capable of leading his or her community and at the most fundamental level, it empowers an individual's soul-intelligence to lead his or her personal life. All the aforementioned is also manifested in the similitude of knowledge as light (*al-nūr*) which illuminates not only one's life but also others.¹⁰

Second Category

Term	Constituent
1) <i>Wilāyah; walī; wālī; mawlā</i>	1) Partner, close confidant; one who is trusted; master, employer
2) <i>Tadbīr; mudabbir</i> ❖ <i>Taşarruf</i> (implementation)	2) Foresight and farsightedness; outcome-oriented; effective doer
3) <i>Ri'āyah; rā'in; (people)</i> ❖ <i>Mas'ūliyyah</i> (responsibility)	3) Shepherd (keeper, guardian, protector, overseer, nurturer); one who is conscientious; [overlaps with <i>tadbīr</i>]
4) <i>Siyāsah</i> (also <i>ḥirāsah</i>)	4) [overlaps with <i>tadbīr</i>]
5) <i>Ḥukūmah; ḥakam; ḥākim</i>	5) Wisdom; right decision, judgement
6) <i>Idārah; mudīr; dār</i>	6) [overlaps with <i>tadbīr</i>]; area, domain, region, territory
7) <i>Niqābah; naqīb</i>	7) One who is meticulous and observant as well as cares for his or her people and their conditions
8) <i>Murshīd</i>	8) Guide
9) <i>Khilāfah; khalīfah</i>	9) Successor, heir, inheritor; one who prepares successors

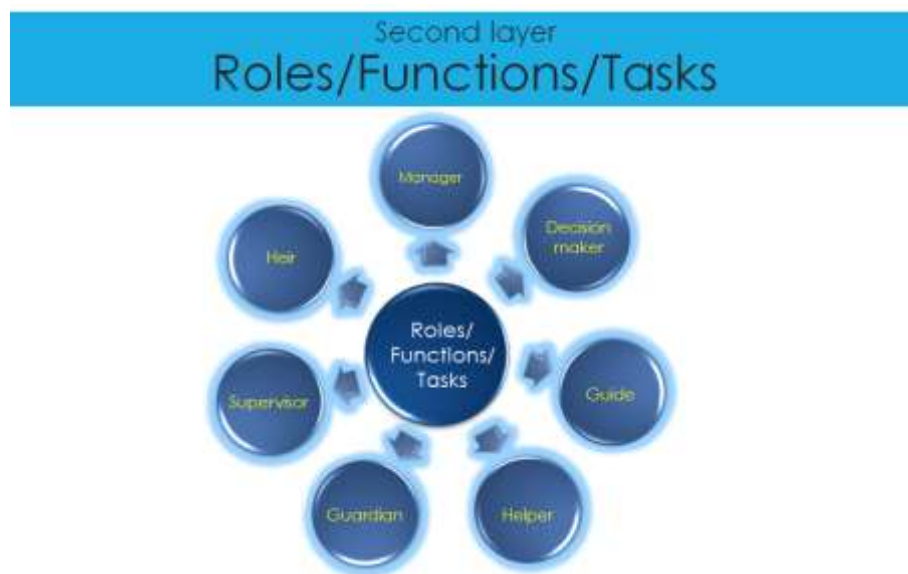
Nine terms in the Second Category above more or less depict the primary roles and duties entrusted upon a leader. A leader governs and exercises authority over a domain or territory and in this regard, acts like a master or employer. A leader is such a person whose foresight and farsightedness realises what is good and who, in pursuing what is praiseworthy while avoiding that which is blameworthy, is attentive to the outcomes. He or she is like a shepherd bearing the responsibilities of being a

¹⁰ Pertaining to the role of knowledge as light in relation to clarity and certainty, see the author's work "Faham Ilmu dalam Islam: Pengamatan terhadap Tiga Takrifan Utama Ilmu," *Afkar: Jurnal Akidah & Pemikiran Islam* 10 (1430H/2009): 39–59; as well as, *Islam and Higher-Order Thinking: An Overview* (Kuala Lumpur: IKIM, 2014), especially Chapter III.

keeper, guardian, protector, overseer or nurturer who is ever watchful. He or she is meticulous and observant, and cares for his or her people and their conditions. A leader also serves as a guide and functions as a trusted ally and partner. A leader acts as an arbiter too, and should be wise and right in his or her decision and judgement. Furthermore, he or she is an heir or successor who not only inherits but also sustains all good practices of the past leaders, practices which evolve into noble customs or traditions; in addition, he or she prepares successors to further preserve the noble customs or traditions.

All in all, even though there are nine terms, four of them—i.e. *tadbīr*, *ri'āyah*, *siyāsah* and *idārah*—overlap in their essential meanings, with *tadbīr* acting as the pivot. More shall be explicated on this key term in the Second Part of this paper. In summary, seven significant roles of a leader could be inferred, as outlined in Diagram 2 below, representing the Second Category.

DIAGRAM 2



Third Category

Term	Constituent
1) <i>Sulṭān</i>	1) Ruler; force and power; authority; influence (charisma)
2) <i>Mulk</i> ; <i>mamlakah</i> ; <i>malik</i> ; <i>mālik</i> ❖ <i>Malakah</i> ; <i>milk</i> ❖ <i>Malā'ikah</i> ; <i>malak</i> (as contrast to <i>'ilm</i>)	2) King; owner; dominion; sovereignty

The Third Category includes two major terms which convey significations that commonly accompany the meanings encapsulated in the terms belonging to the First Category. As a matter of fact, it is difficult to deliberate on leadership without considering not only the exercise of power, authority, or influence but also control or ownership over a particular domain or process. When considered further based on admonitions in the Holy Qur’ān, constituents embedded in this Third Category, as summarised in Diagram 3 below, could derail a leader, usually ending in his or her fall or utter loss.¹¹ However, compared to *mulk*, the term *sultān* is also used for demonstrative arguments (*hujjah*; *burhān*) which are also related to knowledge. The contrast of knowledge against power has been foretold by the Holy Qur’ān, especially in those verses pertaining to the creation of Adam ‘*alayhi al-salām*.¹²

DIAGRAM 3



As far as leadership performance is concerned, constituents in the Third Category should be appropriated to the fullest to perform roles and duties outlined in the Second Category. In this regard, it is important to bear in mind the significance of *tadbīr* which not only forms the foundational meaning of its three other correlates—*ri’āyah*, *siyāsah*, and *idārah*—but also essentially describes what a leader does to those under his or her influence. It is also of utmost importance to note that to a person, the most intimate domain of influence and dominion is actually his or her own self—that is indeed his or her kingdom. As such, leadership essentially rests upon one’s

¹¹ Especially *al-A’rāf*, 7: 20; and *Tā Hā*, 20: 120.

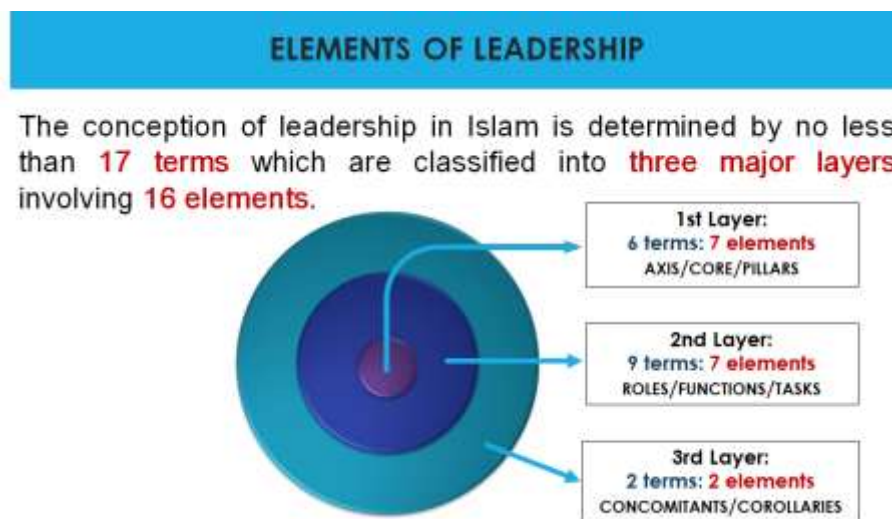
¹² Specifically when *al-Baqarah*, 2: 30–39 is read together with *al-A’rāf*, 7: 11–25; and *Tā Hā*, 20: 115–124. With regard to meanings related to leadership in the Third Category (specifically in terms of the trust in the use of power), it is pertinent to peruse works by Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *On Justice and The Nature of Man: A Commentary on Sūrah al-Nisā’ (4): 58 and Sūrah al-Mu’minūn (23): 12–14* (Kuala Lumpur: IBFIM in collaboration with Akademi Kenegaraan, 2015), specifically 1–28. See also our articles: “Self-knowledge, Self-mastery are Paramount,” *The New Straits Times* (6 August 2019); and “Self-Mastery is the Key to Better Politics,” *The STAR* (20 Feb. 2018).

mastery over one’s self which has been primarily understood in the ethico-religious terms as the soul’s ruling over and governance of the body—*‘alāqat al-tadbīr wa al-taṣarruf*.¹³ In fact, such governance constitutes the essence of ethics founded upon religion (*al-dīn*) and ultimately relates to the hereafter or life after death.¹⁴

Conclusion

The 17 terms listed above can be interpreted as depicting three layers or categories of meaning related to the concept of leader and leadership as illustrated in Diagram 4 below. The First Category comprising six terms—*imāmah*, *imārah*, *riyāṣah*, *siyādah*, *qiyādah* and *shaykh*—can be regarded as constituents forming the seven pillars of leadership. The next nine terms—*wilāyah*, *tadbīr*, *ri‘āyah*, *siyāṣah*, *ḥukūmah*, *idārah*, *niqābah*, *murshid* and *khalīfah*—grouped in the Second Category denote more or less the seven roles and duties of a leader. The Third Category consisting of two words—*sulṭān* and *mulk* (or *mamlakah*)—depicts two concomitants which almost always accompany constituents comprised of the First and Second Categories.

DIAGRAM 4



With the understanding that leadership potentials are endowed by God on certain humans and not the rest,¹⁵ it is incumbent upon us to properly identify them. In this regard, the constitutive elements as aforementioned could be used to build up

¹³ For example, the definition of the human intellect as “a substance separate from matter, yet related to the body as governor and performer” (*jawhar mujarrad ‘an al-māddah yata‘allaq bi al-badan ta‘alluq al-tadbīr wa al-taṣarruf*). See al-Sayyid Sharīf ‘Alī b. Muḥammad al-Jurjānī, *Kitāb al-Ta‘rīfāt*, ed. Ibrāhīm al-Abyārī (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-‘Arabī, 1998), s.v. “‘a-q-l.”

¹⁴ For in-depth expositions on this, see al-Attas, “Islām: The Concept of Religion and the Foundation of Ethics and Morality,” chapter in *Islam & Secularism*; idem, *On Justice*, 28–49; and, idem, *Islam: The Covenants Fulfilled* (Kuala Lumpur: Ta’dib International, 2023).

¹⁵ Such an understanding could be inferred from a few Qur’anic verses, mainly *al-Zukhruf*, 43: 32; and *al-An‘ām*, 6: 165;

psychometric profiling of leadership candidates. The profiles may then serve as a source of guidance or a set of criteria in determining which candidate best suits a particular context as a leader. Leadership potentials, as explained earlier, could be classified into three layers, consisting of no less than 16 constitutive elements. Such layers and elements could be psychometrically developed and formulated to enable us to properly identify potential leaders in order for them to be further nurtured—including with such positive traits or qualities of a leader as being trustworthy, truthful, just and compassionate—and hence elected or appointed to the actual position of leadership.

PART TWO: ON *TADBĪR* BEING THE PIVOT OF LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE¹⁶

As indicated in the First Part of this paper, particularly concerning the Second Category of the constitutive elements of leadership, *tadbīr* is a key term which, acting as a pivot for such other leadership-and-governance-related terms as *ri'āyah*, *siyāsh* and *idārah*, constitutes the centre of their semantic field. In the true performance of *tadbīr*, one has to fix one's mind's attention to outcomes, to ends and consequences, to results. It orientates one to the future, emphasising that one be visionary and farsighted. From an ethical point of view, it demands that one be sagacious, foresightful, and prudent. To borrow an apt description by ibn Ṭiṭṭiqā in his *al-Fakhrī* (said to be composed in 1301), "the determined ruler is he whose decisions precede the occurrence which makes them necessary, and who anticipates a pressing danger before its onset."

Tadbīr, thus, is a particular act of human intelligence and, as such, is synonymous with *tadabbur*, another important term stemming from the same linguistic root. Unfortunately, just like *tadbīr*, *tadabbur* has been widely used loosely, without reference at all to its root meaning in the Arabic language. This then has led to it being misunderstood to be synonymous with other terms that generally denote "thinking" or "contemplation" such as *tafakkur*; hence, the urgent need to provide sufficient explanation on the meaning of *tadabbur*. To do so, it is important that we pay attention to its explication in *al-Ta'rifāt*, a famous dictionary of technical terms by a Muslim polymath of the late 14th and early 15th century, al-Sayyid al-Sharīf 'Alī al-Jurjānī (d.

¹⁶ Most of the Second Part of this paper was originally the author's keynote address on the 1st of June 2022 in the Ninth International Conference on Management and Muamalah (9th ICoMM 2022), with the theme "Reestablishing True Muamalah Towards Real Sustainable Development," at Kolej Universiti Islam Antarabangsa Selangor (KUIS), published and accessible online at <http://conference.kuis.edu.my/icommm/9th/e-proceeding>. It derives entirely from the author's earlier works, three of which were published by IKIM, i.e.: "Imbuing Governance and Science with *Tadbir* for Sustainable Development," Chapter Two (pp. 39–46) in *Science for Sustainable Development: Islamic and Interfaith Perspectives*, ed. Azrina Sobian and Muhammad Husni Mohd. Amin (Kuala Lumpur: Institute of Islamic Understanding Malaysia (IKIM), 2017; reprint 2020); *Good Governance: Adab-Oriented Tadbīr in Islām*, co-authored with Dr. Mohd Sani bin Badron (Kuala Lumpur: Institut Kefahaman Islam Malaysia (IKIM), 2011); as well as "Conceptualizing *Tadbīr* as a Constituent of Governance in Islam," *TAFHIM: IKIM Journal of Islam and the Contemporary World* 3 (2010): 27–47.

1413). “*Tafakkur*,” he explains, “is the directing of the intellect’s observation to proofs while *tadabbur*, to consequences.”¹⁷ As such, the applying of *tadabbur* to the Qur’an specifically means the intellect’s observing and scrutiny of the outcomes as contained in the Qur’an as well as the lessons derived therefrom. In fact, there are no less than 34 verses in the Qur’an which are directly concerned with outcomes, many of them pertaining to earlier peoples who disobeyed God and His prophets.¹⁸

Yet, *tadabbur* applies not only to the Qur’an but also to other matters. Furthermore, such noetic activities need to be comprehensive and holistic in order to qualify as *tadabbur*. This is because sincere, honest and serious contemplation of consequences demands that one be prospective, retrospective, introspective and inspective. It has to be prospective because consequences as results-to-be require that the mind’s eye be directed to the future. The contemplation needs to be retrospective because any noetic act concerned with outcomes has to involve looking at history, examining what has happened, so as to not only identify patterns of events and occurrences which are flowing to the future but also predict their probable ends. The intellectual act should be introspective too. For, it requires its agent to look at his or her own self, assessing his or her strengths vis-à-vis weaknesses, in order to properly plan and be prepared in moving forward with all the anticipated consequences. Finally, it must be inspective because its agent is required to examine his or her current situation in the context of the flow of events to the future. All the four modes of contemplation encapsulated in *tadabbur* as outlined above may also be represented by the combination of sight, insight, hindsight and foresight, all in a single view.

In directing oneself to the future—namely, to the ends and outcomes, *tadbīr* requires that one adopt a balanced and integrated approach. For, *tadbīr* is both thinking and acting; it is knowledge as well as practice; it is mind-set cum life-style. As summarised by al-Jurjānī, *tadbīr* is “the mental act of examining the outcomes by means of knowing what is good, as well as the practical act of putting matters into effect in accordance with the knowledge of what will follow in the end.”¹⁹ Hence, a Muslim who is involved in *tadbīr* must be both knowledgeable and action-oriented; he or she ought to be not only practical and active but also thoughtful and reflective.

Insofar as the absolute knowledge and realisation of the future are concerned, only Allah performs *tadbīr* in the perfect sense. In fact, “The Governor” (*al-Mudabbir*) is one of His Names. In this respect, and in relation to the four Qur’anic verses pertaining to *tadbīr*, a famous Muslim polymath of the thirteenth century C.E., Imām Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, explains:

Allah performing *tadbīr* means: Allah decrees and foreordains

¹⁷ Al-Jurjānī, *Kitāb al-Ta’rīfāt*, s.v. “al-tadbīr” and “tadabbur.”

¹⁸ The verses are: *Āli ‘Imrān*, 3: 137, *al-An‘ām*, 6: 11 and 135; *al-A‘rāf*, 7: 84, 86, 103 and 128; *Yūnus*, 10: 39 and 73; *Hūd*, 11: 49; *Yūsuf*, 12: 109; *al-Nahl*, 16: 36 and 126; *Tāhā*, 20: 132; *al-Hajj*, 22: 41; *al-Naml*, 27: 14, 51 and 69; *al-Qaṣaṣ*, 28: 37, 40 and 83; *al-Rūm*, 30: 9, 10 and 42; *Luqmān*, 31: 22; *Fāṭir*, 35: 44; *al-Ṣāfāt*, 37: 73; *Ghāfir*, 40: 21 and 82; *al-Zukhruf*, 43: 25; *Muḥammad*, 47: 10; *al-Hashr*, 59: 17; *al-Mumtaḥinah*, 60: 11; and *al-Ṭalāq*, 65: 9.

¹⁹ Al-Jurjānī, *Kitāb al-Ta’rīfāt*, s.v. “al-tadbīr.”

according to the requirement of wisdom and He also does that which is done by one whose act is always appropriate and who attends to the ends and outcomes of affairs such that nothing unbecoming would ever come into existence.

In fact, Shāh Waliyyullāh, the well-known Muslim scholar of Delhi of the seventeenth century C.E., in his famous work *Hujjat Allāh al-Bālighah*, argued that with regard to the bringing into being of the world, *tadbīr* is the last in the order of the three intimately-related Divine Attributes-Acts; the other two being *ibdāʿ* (creation *ex-nihilo*) followed by *khalq* (proportioning). As such, in line with the well-established ethical principle of emulating the Names-Attributes of Allah (*takhalluq bi Akhlāq Allāh*), not only does *tadbīr* remind us of Allah but it should also connect any Muslim involved in it with “Him Who Governs Absolutely.” In other words, in as much as a Muslim who governs ought to be ever mindful of the *Mudabbir*, he should also be really humble and accountable before Him.

Tadbīr being essentially outcome-oriented, one should realise that outcomes or results are not identical with aims or objectives. For not every aim will result in an outcome and, likewise, not every outcome achieves the intended aim. As such, there are some elements of unknowability about goals as something yet to be realised in the future, whereas outcomes, when referring to past and present events that are well documented, are more factual. There are indeed varieties of goals and outcomes. Not only are they not always the same but they are also subject to a certain order of priority and posteriority. Some aims are good and noble, some are bad and evil. Yet among the good ones, some are better. Similarly, there are also amidst the bad ones those which are worse. Some ends are more permanent and certain while the rest are ever changing and indefinite. Among them also, there are those which are more ultimate whereas the others only serve as means or intermediaries to the former. Hence, there is a hierarchical system of aims and objectives, having in turn a certain order of methods and ways conducive for living such a system. Very much relevant in this respect is a counsel by the Second Caliph of Islam, ‘Umar al-Faruq, R.A.: “An intelligent person is not merely one who is able to distinguish what is good from what is bad but one who is able to recognise the better of two evils.”

Thus, anyone seriously concerned with *tadbīr* shall have to attend to a fundamental question: how can a Muslim who is tasked with governance determine not only the right goals and outcomes but also the possible correct ways leading thereto? It is in answering such a question that an important epistemic principle applies, which requires that one begin with what is clear, definite and certain in exploring unknown and uncharted territories.²⁰ In this respect, what is generally clear and certain to Muslims is that Allah being The Governor has made manifest in His Two Books not only His wills, rules and regulations but also His signs and symbols. One of the books has been referred to in the religious, intellectual and scientific tradition of

²⁰ For an elaboration on this epistemic principle, see the author’s monograph, *Islam and Higher-Order Thinking*, especially Chapter II and III.

Islam as His Revealed Book (*al-kitāb al-tanzīlī*)—i.e. the Qur'an—exemplified then in the Life of the Prophet Muhammad. The other book, in turn, is known in this tradition as the Created Book (*al-kitāb al-takwīnī*)—i.e. the Cosmic Entirety, or the Universe as a whole.²¹

From the former book, i.e. the Qur'an as well as the Prophet's Life as its manifestation, Muslims can expect to derive guidance, criteria and guidelines. In this regard, since Muslim luminaries derived most of their insights from these two sources, of very much help are the vast legacy of their scholarly writings, including the invaluable legal corpora that contain legal aims and objectives (*al-maqāṣid al-shar'iyyah*) as well as legal maxims (*al-qawā'id al-fiqhiyyah*). It is also in this regard that one should differentiate between human natural desires and their acquired desires, between human needs and human wants, and more specifically, between what falls in the category of *al-darūriyyāt* (the necessities), *al-hājjiyyāt* (the requisites), and *al-tahsīniyyāt* (the complements), respectively.

In regard to matters which are clear and certain in the Qur'an and the Prophetic Traditions, at least two directly concern and involve outcome or end. Firstly, one's goal has to pertain to the Ultimate Outcome, the Last Day (*al-Ākhirah*). For Muslims, without any doubt, the goals one should aim at ultimately have to do with what is already established and certain—that is to say, with the afterlife the doorway to which is death, as well as with the state of happiness (*al-sa'ādah*) in the life-to-come the culmination of which is the gift of the Vision of God (*ru'yat Allāh*). For this reason, no pursuit of goals can be irreligious, being driven merely by pragmatic and utilitarian considerations. In Islam, governance is as much a teleological science as it is the art of deployment; it concerns not only the outer, societal facets of human life but also—and in fact more fundamentally—its inner, individual dimensions. Furthermore, governance as applied to the human self, his household, as well as his community and the state—which in earlier centuries is actualised as ethics, economy and politics—is such as to realise justice and real propriety (*'adl* and *adab*) as prerequisites of happiness; hence, the human self, his household, as well as his community and the state is to be conceived of and accordingly addressed not as discontinuous, independent sectors but instead as realms constituting a continuous spectrum, different yet mutually related and reflexive.

Secondly, the objective has to ultimately relate to Allah, whose name among others is THE END (*al-Ākhir*). The spirit of *tawḥīd* which is so inherent in Islam demands that one's end comprise not only goods of this world (*al-dunyā*) but also those of the hereafter (*al-ākhirah*), especially when man finally returns to his Almighty Creator. Since God is also The First and The Last (*al-Awwal wa al-Ākhir*), the origin

²¹ For further details, see the author's two earlier articles: "The Nature of the Cosmos and its Implications on Science Education," *Educational Awakening: Journal of the Educational Sciences* 5, no. 1 (2008) (Institute of Education, International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM)): 103–130; as well as, "The Cosmos as the Created Book and its Implications for the Orientation of Science," *Islam & Science: Journal of Islamic Perspectives on Science* 6, no. 1 (Summer 2008): 31–53. The latter article was also republished in *Studies in the Islam and Science Nexus*, volume 1 of *Islam and Science: Historic and Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Muzaffar Iqbal, 4 vols. (Farnham, England, dan Burlington, USA: Ashgate, 2012).

and the end (*al-mabda' wa al-ma'ād*) in Islam ultimately point to the very same Being who not only out of His Mercy bestows upon His creatures the gift of existence but also assigns them their specific significance and places in the vast hierarchies of being. In fact, as man comes from Allah unto Him also will he return, and no one, if he really knows, will wish a bad return. Hence, Allah is, for the true believers, their sole focus of attention and concern.²²

As to the latter Book—that is to say the Cosmos as a whole, the Divine Governance of it is indeed His Pattern of Recurrent Acts which has been referred to as the all-inclusive *Sunnat ALLāh*, appearing partly in the modes of Cause-Effect correlation and of the rise and decline of nations and civilisations in the theatre of history, holding sway not only over the physical domains but also over the ethico-spiritual realms, regulating not only socio-political life but also individual and family lives. Granted the regularity of the *Sunnat ALLāh*, which Allah Himself has promised us in the Qur'an and which Muslims believe in, it is partly to the past and present outcomes that one's mind should be directed in order to not only derive some meaningful lessons and useful insights in predicting the future, but to also avoid repeating similar mistakes, facing much the same pitfalls, and being trapped in essentially the same quagmire. In this respect, in governance, a Muslim mind must make the utmost use of hindsight and derive the best lessons from history. Such is actually the meaning of the Prophet Muhammad's reminder: "A believer is not stung twice in the same hole." Hence, in carrying out *tadbīr* faithfully a Muslim needs to be as much retrospective (in fact, introspective, as well) as he be prescient.

In fact, it is in relation to the *Sunnat ALLāh* that governance when imbued with the spirit of *tadbīr* will have to not only involve science but also become undetached from theology. By science-cum-theology here is meant the very first thing Muslims of earlier times had been taught when they began to learn the Creeds of Islam, the one referred to terminologically as *'aqīdah*. Among the necessary preliminaries, or *sine qua non*, of learning such creeds during those times is one's good grasp of the difference—though not necessarily in an exclusive manner—of the three primary kinds of judgments which humans cannot avoid passing when assessing various matters.

The three are (1) judgments proceeding from the *sharī'ah* (Islamic Law); (2) judgments issuing from human reason; and (3) judgments arising from the human experience of series of happenings in the world. The standard terms employed to refer to them are *al-ḥukm al-sharī'*, *al-ḥukm al-'aqlī* and *al-ḥukm al-'ādī*, respectively. By the first kind of judgements are meant the five main categories of rulings in the Islamic Law, i.e., *ḥarām* (forbidden), *makrūh* (strongly disliked), *mubāḥ* (permissible), *mandūb* (commendable) and *wājib* (obligatory). The second kind, in turn, refers to the three categories of rational estimation which logic is primarily concerned with, that is to say, *mustaḥīl* (impossible), *jā'iz* or *mumkin* (possible) and *wājib* (necessary). As such, it is important that one does not confuse *wājib* belonging to the first kind with *wājib* of this

²² See the Holy Qur'an: *al-Baqarah*, 2: 46; *al-Mā'idah*, 5: 105; *Yūnus*, 10: 4; *al-Hajj*, 22: 41; *al-Mu'minūn*, 23: 60; *al-Qaṣaṣ*, 28: 70; *Luqman*, 31: 22; *al-Najm*, 53: 25; *al-Ḥadīd*, 57: 3; and *al-Layl*, 92: 13.

second kind! The third kind consists in human efforts of establishing the sort of existential relation a thing has with another thing, be it positively or negatively, such efforts being based mainly on the recurrence of such things in the past, be the recurrence distant in time or quite recent.

To illustrate this last kind of judgments in simple terms, let us take the example of the relation between “one’s thirst” and “one’s act of drinking” as two atomic occurrences. In one’s assessment of the nature of their relation, one will have to judge based on at least one’s own experience of them before passing the reasonable judgment that one’s act of drinking relates negatively to one’s thirst, if not at all times, at least most of the times. In so doing, one will also expect the same to hold water in the future while being aware that one may also be mistaken in one’s anticipation or forecast. In fact, such kind of judgments properly belongs to what we may generally regard now as the realm of science.

As to the relation between the second and third kinds of judgments, it should be noted that according to Islamic Theology (*‘Ilm al-Tawḥīd*, *‘Ilm Uṣūl al-Dīn* or *‘Ilm al-Kalām*), not only is the existential status of the entire creation in itself contingent (*mumkin*) but even all its parts—including series of events—are also possible. Indeed, they as a whole are often referred to as *al-mumkināt* (the possibles or possibilities) in the sense that according to the mere judgment of human reason without recourse to actual human experience, just as they may or may not happen, they may happen this way or in any other way. As such, to somewhat ascertain the way they have been and may also be subsequently, a person needs to take into account the actual human experience of them, particularly as recorded faithfully in history. An *‘ādah* (Malay: *adat*), as alluded to earlier, is “the way a thing has been” so much so that the manner it has been recurring is regarded as its custom. As nothing in the world is considered to be not the Acts of God (meaning God’s creation), another term which such scholars also frequently use to refer to *‘ādah* is *Sunnat ALIāh*, namely, God’s customary way of acting.²³

All the foregoing explanation on the meaning of *tadbīr* should have been sufficient to demonstrate its pivotal position in leadership and governance. In fact, Imam Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazzālī, the most eminent Muslim scholar of the eleventh–twelfth century C.E., in a special chapter dedicated to explicating knowledge and intellect in his famous work, *Iḥyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn*, considered human intelligence which has arrived at such a mental station as being couched in *tadbīr* to be intellectually mature. Such as the aforementioned might have been among the reasons why our Prophet Muhammad, S.A.W. had declared: “No mind is as good as *tadbīr*.” Nevertheless, despite its significance as outlined above, *tadbīr* being a familiar word to almost all Muslims itself poses a great challenge because an overwhelming majority of them tend to stick to its prevalent vulgarised, or corrupted, sense at the expense of its original import as espoused in the Islamic Religious, Intellectual and Scientific

²³ For an explanation on *mu‘jizah* (miracle) vis-à-vis *‘ādah*, see the author’s article, “Science and Religion amidst Covid-19,” Chapter 1 (pp. 7–11) in *Islam & Pandemics: Lessons from Covid-19*, ed. Mastura binti Mohd Zain and Mohamad A’sim bin Ismail (Kuala Lumpur: IKIM, 2020).

Tradition. As such, it goes without saying that the very first step towards imbuing leadership and governance with the original spirit of *tadbīr* involves necessarily the drawing of people's attention to its genuine, balanced and comprehensive meaning as discussed in the foregoing paragraphs. In a world where praiseworthy leadership and good governance have been increasingly pressing issues, that *tadbīr* encapsulates all the aforementioned is very telling and calls for our immediate attention and concerted efforts.