Conceptualising *Tadbīr* as a Constituent of Governance in Islām

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**Abstract:**
The present-day Muslims, in addressing the contemporary issue of governance, may not necessarily have to object to the way, or ways, it has been understood and defined by their Western counterparts. Yet, they can still offer a more rather refined description of it which, as this article suggests, may come in the form of *tadbīr* being an essential constituent of governance. By elaborating on the concept projected by the term through a detailed...
explanation of its basic and derived meanings, both lexically and within the context of the Qur'an and the Prophetic Traditions, as well as their various ethical-teleological implications, the article basically demonstrates that ṭadbir in the religious, intellectual and scientific tradition of Islam is both thinking and act which are organically aimed at obtaining good outcomes and, when specifically applied to man, means the intellectual deliberation over the outcome of an affair, followed either by its implementation if the outcome is praiseworthy or its rejection if the result is estimated to be blameworthy.

**Keywords:** ṭadbir, governance, purpose, end, outcome, ethics, morality, good and bad, Sunnatu'Llah, cosmos, universe, cause-effect, history.

**Some preliminary notes**

It is to be duly noted that one of the distinctive features of the religious, intellectual and scientific tradition of Islam is the utmost care given to the correct and precise connotation and denotation of terminologies, a feature rendered possible

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2 This has been sufficiently explained by Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas in some of his writings, especially *Islam and Secularism* (Kuala Lumpur: Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia [ABIM], 1978); *The Concept of Education in Islam: A Framework for an Islamic Philosophy of Education* (Kuala Lumpur: Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia [ABIM], 1980); *The Positive Aspects of Taṣawwuf: Preliminary Thoughts on an Islamic Philosophy of Science* (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Academy of Science [ASASI], 1981); *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam* (Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization [ISTaC], 1995; second ed., 2001); *Risalah untuk Kaum Muslimin* (A Treatise with Important Reminders for the Muslims) (Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization [ISTaC], 2001); and *Tinjauan Ringkas Peri Ilmu dan Pendangan Alam* (A Brief Survey on Knowledge and Worldview) (Penang: Universiti Sains Malaysia [USM], 2007). Relevant also in this respect are some of Toshihiko Izutsu's works on the semantics of several Islamic key terms, particularly his *God and Man in the Qur'an: Semantics of the Qur'ānic Weltanschauung* (Tokyo: Keio University, 1964; republished, Petaling Jaya: Islamic Book Trust, 2002) and *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qur'an* (Montreal: McGill University
by the root system of the Arabic language and the emphasis placed on language and naming, in relation to thought and knowledge, in the Holy Qur'ān and the Prophetic Traditions. Governance, being a topic of great relevance as much as a concept that points to a particular activity or process, cannot therefore be an exception to the aforementioned rule on terminological precision. Whereas the notion of governance is not new—in fact, as claimed by some, it is as ancient as human society—we cannot deny that in the contemporary context, governance has been much discussed in Western academic circles. As is widely perceived, the West through its many representatives and agencies, has been championing its cause. Hence, Muslims who are interested to address the foregoing cannot avoid attending to the way, or ways, it has been understood and defined by their Western counterparts.

For the purpose of our present discussion, we shall glance at some of the mainstream views of governance, adopted by a number of Western representatives and agencies. From the viewpoint of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), for instance, “governance” is the exercise of economic, political and administrative authority to manage a country’s affairs at all levels, comprising the mechanisms, processes and institutions through which citizens and groups

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4 For instance, the famous saying of the Prophet, “Min ḥusn Isḥām al-mar’ tarkuk mā lā ya’nih,” which emphasises inter alia precision in language and, as such, is well encapsulated in the maxim jawāmī’ al-kalim. For some scholarly commentaries on the above saying, see al-Imām Muḥy al-Dīn Abū Zakariyyā Yahyā al-Nawawī (d. 676 A.H.), Sharh al-ʿArba’īn Ḥadīthān al-Nawawiyah, together with his al-Ishārāt ilā Daftar al-ʿAlfāz al-Mushkiliyyāt, ed. Abū l-ʿAzīz ʿIzz al-Dīn al-Sayrāwān (Damascus: Dār Qutaybah, 1990), tradition no. 12, pp. 120-122; and al-Imām ibn Daqīq al-ʿId (d. 702 A.H.), Sharh al-ʿArba’īn al-Nawawiyah fi al-ʿAbādīh al-Ṣalihīyah al-Nabawiyah (Beirut: Dār ibn Hazm, 1997), tradition no. 12, pp. 64-65. See also our article “Verbosity a Vice and Burden” in The Star (2 March 2010).
articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights, meet their obligations and mediate their differences. The Asian Development Bank (ADB) however, while admitting that the term “governance” means different things to different people, prefers to understand it as “the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country’s economic and social resources for development.”

It is clear that the aforementioned two ways of describing governance very much reflect the objectives, concerns and orientations of the two organisations involved. Yet, one may want to find a more basic and general way to depict it, which is able to incorporate but is by no means limited to the foregoing two ways. In this regard, one may find agreeable the manner the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has introduced it: “The term governance, as generally used, encompasses all aspects of the way a country, corporation, or other entity is governed.” Alternatively and somewhat more precisely, the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) chooses to describe it as “the process of decision-making and the process by which decisions are implemented (or not implemented).”

Although we may surmise that any enlightened Muslim will not have fundamental objections to the aforementioned

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8 See the article entitled “What is Good Governance?” in the official website of The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, at http://www.unescap.org/pdd/prs/ProjectActivities/Ongoing/gg/governance.asp (accessed 23 February 2009). The PDF version of the same article can also be downloaded at http://www.unescap.org/pdd/prs/ProjectActivities/Ongoing/gg/governance.pdf.
descriptions of governance—particularly that of UNESCAP, what can still be done is to offer a more rather refined description of it and, as we shall discuss further hereinafter, one such refinement may come in the form of tadbir, both as *theoria* and as *praxis*, being an essential constituent of governance. In the following paragraphs, we shall elaborate on the concept projected by this Arabic term by explaining its basic and derived meanings, both lexically and within the context of the Qur’ān and the Prophetic Traditions, as well as their various ethico-teleological implications. Such an explanation, instead of being regarded as being exclusivist in nature, should rather be taken as an integral dimension of an in-depth discussion and analysis of the issue of leadership and governance in Islām via a profound understanding of the semantic field and mental map projected by a network of such key terms as *imāmah*, *sulṭān*, *mulk*, *imārah*, *ri‘āyah*, *khilāfah*, *tadbir*, *siyāsah*, *ḥukūmah*, *wilāyah*, *wizārah*, and *idārah*, terms whose variant forms have been used in the Qur’ān and the various sayings of the Prophet Muḥammad, as well as by the authoritative figures throughout the long religious, intellectual and scientific tradition of Islām.

**Tadbir as outcome-oriented thinking and act**

As has been duly recognised by a number of studies carried out in modern times, *tadbir* is clearly an important Arabic term, with clear basic and derived meanings, to refer to the act and process which may be generally referred to in English as “administration,” “management,” or “governance.” The term actually has its origins in the triliteral root word *dubur*,

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a noun that conveys the idea of “back,” “end,” or “result.” The Arabic expression “dubur kull shay,” for instance, means “the outcome, or end, of every thing.” When *tadbīr*, which is a *maṣdar* (verbal noun) of the verb “dabbara,” is used with the Arabic word *amr*, it produces the phrase *tadbīr al-amr*, (literally: one’s governance or management of an affair), signifying thus “one’s act of relating an affair to its end or result.” And insofar as human logic grants, such an act of relating can be either mental or extramental, intellectual or practical.\(^{10}\)

In fact, one simply has to peruse numerous books in the religious, intellectual and scientific tradition of Islam to find unanimity among scholars concerning the above meaning. A few examples here will suffice:

a. *Tadbīr* on a matter is “to mentally observe what its outcome is to be.” (Muḥammad b. Abū Bakr al-Ḥāfīzī, a famous lexicologist, d. 666 A.H.);\(^{11}\)

b. *Tadbīr* is “the mental act of looking into the consequences of the affairs so that a praiseworthy result will be obtained.” (al-Qādi ʿAbd Allāh al-Bayḍāwī, a well-known exegete of the Holy Qur’an, theologian, and jurist, d. 791 A.H.);\(^{12}\)

c. *Tadbīr* is “the act of examining the outcomes by means of knowing what is good,” as well as “the act of putting matters into effect in accordance with the knowledge of what will follow in the end.” (al-Sayyid al-Sharīf ʿAlī al-Jurjānī, d. 816 A.H.);\(^{13}\)


The aforementioned definitions at the very least highlight that _tadbir_, whether as a mode of thinking or a kind of human action, is outcome-oriented. Two fundamental points regarding the act or process which may correctly be referred to as _tadbir_ are worth emphasising. Firstly, purpose or end is both integral and central to such an act or process. Secondly, in line with the paramount role of _tawhid_ (unity as well as unifying) in Islam, the act or process not only encompasses two different operational modes—that is, knowledge and practice—but also integrates both the foregoing into an organic single. At the level of knowledge or thinking, it comprises one’s act of deliberating the possible outcomes with every intention of knowing what is good and, thus, can somewhat be translated into English as “purposive reflection,” “foresight,” “prudence,” “sagacity,” or “farsightedness.” At the practical stage, it involves the act of executing something in order to obtain good results. Furthermore, both knowledge and practice involved in the process of _tadbir_ do not thus simply aim for any goal, but only at goals which are praiseworthy. In this respect, _tadbir_ is an extension and the embodiment of the freedom of choice in Islam which, as argued by Syed Muḥammad Naquib al-Attas, is termed _ikhtiyār_ (ikhtiar in Malay) and ought to be based solely on what is good (_khayr_). In short, such definitions demonstrate that governance is not simply about the _process_ of decision-making and the _process_ by which decisions are implemented but also about the _substance_ of the decision-making, namely: _noble ends, desirable outcomes_,

15 Al-Attas, Prolegomena, 33-34 and 93-94.
praiseworthy results, and good consequences.

It is also pertinent here that one be cognisant of the fact that eminent Muslim lexicologists, such as ibn al-Manṣūr (d. 711 AH.) in his Lisān al-ʿArab and al-Fīrūzabādī (d. 817 AH.) in his al-Qāmūs al-Muhīṭ, have recorded that ṭadabbur—which is a verbal noun of another cognate word, ṭadabbara—is synonymous with the meaning of ṭadbīr at the epistemic or theoretical level. The expression ṭadabbara al-amr, being the fifth derivative of the triliteral root verb da-ba-ra, connotes one’s search for the end, or outcome, of an affair. In the above sense, therefore, ṭadabbur is synonymous with ṭadbīr which, as previously explained, consists of one’s mentally looking into the outcome of an affair, and depending on the occasion, may be rendered into English as “purposive reflection,” “foresight,” “prudence,” “farsightedness,” or “sagacity.”¹⁶

In fact, al-Jurjānī in his famous Kitāb al-Ṭaʿrifat succinctly explained the subtle difference between the two modes or types of thinking, one being termed ṭafakkur and the other, ṭadabbur, respectively. According to him, although both are mental acts or dispositions, the former consists of one’s directing one’s mental observation and scrutiny towards proof or evidence, whereas the latter involves one’s directing attention towards the end or outcome.¹⁷

It is therefore clear that ṭadbīr at the epistemic level, or ṭadabbur as its synonym, denotes a particular mode of thinking, namely, thinking which is being specifically directed towards an outcome or result with the intention of knowing what is good, praiseworthy and noble. Hence, any act of governance, management or administration deserved of being referred to as ṭadbīr needs not only involve that mode of thinking but also needs to nurture and nourish it. Otherwise, one is simply

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¹⁷ Al-Jurjānī, al-Ṭaʿrifat, s.v. “ṭadbīr.”
misappropriating the term.

**Tadbir in the Qurʾān**

Although the term *tadbir* itself is not used in the Qurʾān, the present tense of its verbal form, *yudabbir*, is repeated four times. In all of such occasions, the verb is accompanied by the term *al-amr* and refers to a particular type of Divine Act. One therefore reads *yudabbir al-amr* whose meaning, for want of an exact English equivalent, is “He (that is, Allāh) governs the affairs.” The word *amr* in Arabic, apart from connoting “a command or a decree,” may also mean “an affair, an entity, an event, or a state.” Both meanings, though apparently distinct, are indeed closely related, at least insofar as the Islamic cosmological scheme is concerned. For God commands, and at His creative Behest, things come into being and events take place.

The expression *yudabbir al-amr* in the aforementioned cases is also mentioned alongside the facts of creation, whether celestial or terrestrial. Among the Arabic terms used for the act of creating in those instances is *khalaqa* whose infinitive, *khalq*, may mean either “to create something in a form which has no precedence” or “to predetermine, to ordain, or to give measure (*al-taqdir)*.” One may therefore infer, on justified grounds, that not only does Allāh bring all the creatures and events into existence according to a comprehensive design predetermined in His Perfect Knowledge, but He also generously sustains and governs all of them. The erudite theologian, jurist and commentator of the Qurʾān, Imām Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 604 A.H.), in commenting on one of those four Qurʾānic verses, said: “*Yudabbir al-amr* (literally “Allāh governs the affairs”) means that Allāh decrees and foreordains according to the

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18 See Yūnus (10): 3 and 31; al-Raʾd (13): 2; and al-Sajadah (32): 5.
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.  

Similarly, the traditionist-theologian Imām al-Bayhaqī (d. 458 A.H.), in his Kitāb al-I’tiqād wa al-Hidāyah ʿilā Sabīl al-Rashād, explains that Allāh as The Governor is both omniscient—including His knowing the end and outcome of each and every thing—and omnipotent, involving His deciding in accordance with His Knowledge and His acting just as He decides. In fact, Shāh Wāliyullāh (d. 1176 A.H.), the well-known Muslim scholar of Delhi, 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; the other two Attributes being ‘ibdā’ followed by khalq. Such being the case, one quite often comes across renowned luminaries—like the famous Ibn ‘Aṭāʾillah al-İskandari (d. 709 A.H.) in his Kitāb al-Ḥikam as well as Kitāb al-Tanwīr fī Isqāṭ al-Tadbīr—admonishing people to be confident in, as well as preferring, Divine Governance in all matters, and to not be deluded by the apparent sufficiency of one’s own governance.

The Divine Governance of the entire cosmos is indeed His Pattern of Recurrent Acts (Sunnatu’Ilāh), which is all-inclusive,

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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 domain but also over the ethico-spiritual realm, regulating not only socio-political life but also individual and family lives.  

**Tadbir in the Prophetic Traditions**

It has been made very clear in the preceding paragraphs that tadbir, as well as its cognate term tadabbur, signifies, among others, the mental act of probing into the consequence(s) of an affair so that a praiseworthy result may be worked out and thus obtained. We have also mentioned earlier that tadbir is an extension and the embodiment of the freedom of choice in Islam, referred to as ikhtiýâr, and ought to be based solely on what is good (khayr). In this context, one is well reminded about an occasion when a man went to meet the Prophet Muhammad for a lasting piece of advice to whom the Prophet said: “If you happen to want something, reflect (tadabbar) then upon its consequence (‘aqibatahu); if its outcome is good (khayr), perform it. Otherwise, stop doing it.”

It has also been reported that the Second Caliph of Islam, ʿUmar al-Farūq, had declared: “An intelligent person (al-‘iql) is not merely one who is able to distinguish what is

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good (khayr) from what is bad (sharr) but one who is able to recognize the better (i.e., the lesser) of two evils (khayr min al-sharrayn).”26 The need for such intelligence is as pertinent in the evaluation of one’s goals and action plans as it is in assessing any current state of affairs.

Such being the essential meaning of tadbir, ethics and morality is therefore rendered inherent. It is indeed expected of a person truly possessed of reason to base his acts on a close examination into the possible outcomes of his actions, carefully discriminating between good and bad, right and wrong, true and false, and then wholeheartedly choosing the good while avoiding the bad. The act of trying to attain praiseworthy results by abstaining from what is blameworthy truly constitutes the practical side of tadbir which, as cited before, also means “the act of putting matters into effect in accordance with the knowledge of what will follow in the end.”27


27 A purposive reflection must also consist of serious endeavours to sort out qualities and virtues, measures, methods, ways, tactics, strategies and plans—incorporating but by no means limited to the attempts to identify qualified manpower and necessary resources—which could guarantee the attainment of the praiseworthy ends. Such purposive intellectual process, which should be dynamic and far from being static, ought to also involve one’s awareness of and guard against any type of obstacles that can jeopardise the plan, and subsequently hinder—or in the least delay—one from securing the desired results. It is in this regard that one should deal not only with such virtues as integrity and accountability which are commonly considered to be integral constituents of good governance but also with other contentious elements and principles espoused by the various agencies and institutions in the West as characteristics of such governance, provided that they be critically assessed and reinterpreted wherever relevant. For examples of characteristics advocated by such agencies and institutions, see the article entitled “What is Good Governance?” in the official website of The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, at http://www.unescap.org/pdd/prs/ProjectActivities/Ongoing/gg/governance.asp, and to download the
In addition, one’s act of abstaining from that which is prohibited and that which is evil is part and parcel of piety. If a man perseveres in correct behaviour by abstaining from that which is forbidden, such a tendency will eventually be natural to him such that it becomes his habit or character—his second, or acquired, nature, as the scholars of ethics would say. This, in truth, goes to the making of good character which commands respect and is what nobility really is.

In *Sunan ibn Mājah*, an established collection of the Prophetic Traditions, the Prophet was reported to have declared: “There is no equivalent of reason (‘aql) as purposive reflection (al-tadbīr), no piety (wara’) as abstinence (al-kaff), and no nobility (hasaba) like good character (husn al-khuluq).”28 That he combines all those three elements—namely, reason, piety and nobility—in a single saying is already good grounds for us to hold that purposive reflection, abstinence, and good character are mutually related, and each functions to shed more light on the others. In fact, Imām al-Ghazzālī (d. 505 A.H) in a special book dedicated to explicating knowledge and intellect in his famous Ḥiyā’ “Ulm al-Dīn, considered human intelligence which has arrived at such a mental station, as being couched in the aforementioned Prophetic Tradition, to be one which has attained intellectual maturity.29

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28 See “Bāb al-Wara’ wa al-Taqwā” of “Abwāb al-Zuhd” in Ibn Mājah’s Kitāb al-Sunan, containing in its margin ‘Abd al-Ghānī al-Dahlāwī’s Injāb al-Hādhā and al-Suyūṭī’s Maḥbūb al-Zuwārāj (Delhi: Al-Maṭba’ al-Fārūqī, 1282 A.H.), 321. In al-Nawawī’s Ṣaḥīḥ al-‘Arba’īn Ḥadīthān al-Nasawiyyah (p. 122), it was related that the aforementioned saying of the Prophet is part of his long advice to Abū Dharr, one of his famous companions. A full translation of this advice is available in pdf form from http://marifah.net/articles/increase%20me.pdf.

29 See our work, *The Sources of Knowledge in al-Ghazālī’s Thought: A
Some ethico-teleological implications

The Qur’ān in its four verses above is explicit about Allāh being the one who governs the entire universe(s) Al-Mudabbir (The Governor), as such, is a Divine Name and Attribute. In fact, a number of renowned scholars of Islām, such as al-Bayhaqī and al-Ghazzālī, were unequivocal about it. As previously explained, Allāh’s governance of the entire cosmos is indeed His Pattern of Recurrent Acts, the one referred to as the all-inclusive Ṣunnatu’Llāh. It has also been an established moral teaching in Islām, grounded in a number of Qur’ānic verses and numerous sayings of the Prophet and aptly summarised in the well-known adage “takhallaqū bi akhlāq Allāh,” that man has to emulate such Divine Names and Attributes as befit man according to his real ability. For in truth, the Names and Attributes of Allāh constitute the standard of manners and praiseworthy deeds for Muslims. A Muslim, hence, must try his level best to be a governor or administrator in its comprehensive sense, covering as many spectrums and layers of existence as possible.
The religious, intellectual and scientific tradition of Islam in fact does not lack writings that reflect such an all-embracing understanding of governance. For instance, a mere glance at the use of the term *tadbir* in the titles of various books, each of them dealing with a different field of discussion, already shows to what extent the term applies. Such books, to mention but a few, are: Ibn al-Jazzār al-Qayrawānī’s *Kitāb Sīyāsat al-Sibyān wa Tadbiruhum* and Aḥmad al-Balḍī’s *Kitāb Tadbir al-Ḥabālā wa al-Âṭfāl wa al-Ṣibyān*, both having to do with child management; Jābir ibn Ḥayyān’s *Tadbir al-Ikṣīr al-Âʿzām* regarding chemistry; Ibn Bājja’s *Tadbir al-Mutawāḥḥīd* (the Conduct of the Solitary), on philosophical issues and individual ethics; Ibn ‘Arabi’s *al-Tadbīrāt al-Ilāhiyyah fi Ḳīlāh al-Mamlakah al-Insāniyyah* pertaining to ontologico-cosmological topics, and Ibn Abū al-Rabi‘ī’s *Ṣulūk al-Mālik fi Tadbir al-Mamlāk* on political and governmental issues. In ethics, for example, there is a division called *Tadbir al-Manzil* (the governance of household).

Since Allah is the Real Governor and man is merely His servant and vicegerent, the latter is governor only in the derivative and relative sense. As such, he has to govern and manage according to the laws set by the Real Governor, which are no other than His customary way of acting—the
Sunnatu’Llah—within which is subsumed the Divine Pattern of Recurrent Acts in governing the affairs of His entire creation.

Moreover, if one is to reflect seriously on the nature of outcomes in relation to aims and objectives, one will surely come to at least two important findings. Firstly, that goals or objectives, despite their being related in many respects to ends or outcomes, are not really synonymous. 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 events that are well documented, are more factual. Secondly, 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.

The main question then is: how can one intellectually determine not only one’s right goals—as future matters that are unknown and uncertain, in relation to the outcomes as something clear and established—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.32 In this respect, what is

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32 For some explanation on this epistemic principle, see our articles in “IKIM Views,” as published in the daily The Star of 29 January, 22 July
generally clear and certain to the Muslims is that Allah being
The Governor has made manifest not only His wills, rules
and regulations but also His signs and symbols (singular:
āyāt Allāh; plural: āyāt Allāh) in His Two Books. One of the
books has been referred to in the religious, intellectual and
scientific tradition of Islam as His Revealed Book (al-kitāb al-
tanzili)—i.e. the Qur'ān—exemplified then in the Life of the
Prophet Muḥammad (transmitted to the later generations as
his ḥadīth, sunnah and sirah). The other book, in turn, is known
in this tradition as the Created Book (al-kitāb al-takwini), i.e.
the Cosmic Entirety. 33

From the Qur'ān and the Prophetic Traditions, Muslims
can expect to derive guidance, be it general or specific, including
in the form of reliable yardsticks, criteria and guidelines. Since
past Muslim luminaries derived most of their insights from
these two sources, of very much help also in this respect are the
vast legacy of their scholarly writings, including the invaluable
legal corpora that contain voluminous writings on legal

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33 It is pertinent here that one fully realises the fact that the various entities
and events which constitute the Cosmos are considered in the Qur'ān
(for instance, Fussūlat [41]: 53) and the Prophetic Traditions to be God’s
signs and symbols. Such signs and symbols taken as a whole—that is, the
World of Nature, the Universe—are indeed referred to in the Islamic
religious, intellectual and scientific tradition as al-‘ilām, a term which
is originally used to point to anything instrumental and indicative in
the obtainment of the knowledge of something else. The Cosmos is
thus conceived of as an open, grand, created Book, consisting of Divine
Signs and Symbols, and has been defined theologically as “everything
other than God which points to Him.” For an explanation on this, see
the author’s four related articles: “The Cosmos as the Created Book,”
31-53; “Kosmos dalam Pandangan Hidup Islam,” 12-31; “Perihal Alam
Semesta sebagai Kitab Kejadian dan Kesan Ilmiahnya pada Hala-
tuju Sains Tabii: Satu Liputan Ringkas Menurut Rencana Pemikiran
al-Attas,” Akbar: Jurnal Akidah & Pemikiran Islam 8, (1428H/2007): 83-
109; and “The Nature of the Cosmos and its Implications on Science
Education,” Educational Awakening: Journal of the Educational Sciences
(Institute of Education, International Islamic University Malaysia
Two of such matters which are clear and certain in the Qur’ān and the Prophetic Traditions are: Firstly, one’s goal has to pertain to the Ultimate Outcome, the Last Day (al-Akhirah). 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-se’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 Islām, governance is as much a teleological science as it is the art of deployment. Secondly, the objective has to ultimately relate to Allāh, whose name among others is THE END (al-Ākhir). The spirit of tawḥid (that is, unity and unifying) which is so inherent in Islām 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 and the end (al-mabda’ wa al-ma’ād) in Islām 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 Allāh unto Him also will he return, and no one, if he really knows, will wish for a bad return. Hence, Allāh is, for the true believers, their sole focus of attention and concern.

As to His Created Book—i.e. the Cosmos as a whole—the Divine Governance of the entire cosmos is indeed His Pattern of Recurrent Acts (the Sunnatu’Ullāh). Granted the regularity of this Pattern of Recurrent Acts, which Allāh Himself has promised us in the Qur’ān and which Muslims

believe in, it is partly to the past outcomes that one's noetic observations should be directed in order to not only derive some meaningful lessons and useful insights with regard to the future, but to also avoid repeating similar mistakes, facing much the same pitfalls, and being trapped in essentially the same quagmire.\textsuperscript{38}

In other words, as Muslims believe that Allah is the Real Governor of the entire universe(s), they have to govern and manage according to the laws set by Him, which are no other than His customary way of acting—the Sunnatu'Llāh—within which is subsumed the Divine Pattern of Recurrent Acts in governing the affairs of His entire creation. Only those bestowed with the knowledge of His customary way of acting are in a much better position to manage their affairs properly such that real ends and good results shall be obtained. Such knowledge basically involves one's understanding of Allah's Legislative Commands (al-amr al-taklīfī), which act as one's primary guidance, as well as one's knowing the Divine Pattern of executing His Creative Command (al-amr al-takwīnī).\textsuperscript{39} And to know both the Legislative Commands of God and the Divine Pattern of executing His Creative Command, not only must one sincerely and seriously attend to His Revelation—the Holy Qur'ān and its embodiment in the Personality and Life of the Prophet Muḥammad—but one also has to continuously


\textsuperscript{39} For an explanation on the difference as well as the relation between these two types of Divine Command (al-amr al-ṣāliḥi), see Suʿād al-Ḥakīm, Al-Muʿjam al-Ṣāfi: Al-Ḥikmah fi Ḥudūd al-Kalīmah (Beirut: Dandarah, 1981), s.v. “al-amr.”
observe and contemplate His signs and symbols in the Cosmos.

**Conclusion**

It should have been clear and established by now that *tadbīr* is meaning-wise clear and definite. It has not undergone much semantic change, thus signifying basically the same thing to different people at different times. As clarified earlier, *tadbīr* in the religious, intellectual and scientific tradition of Islam is *both thinking and act which are organically aimed at obtaining good outcomes*. When regarded as an essential constituent of governance, it renders governance an organic unity of both theory and practice, the unifying focal factor in governance being the praiseworthy end to be aimed at and accordingly realised. Governance as such presupposes order or system, implied by the term *khalq*, and does not have to be confined only to inter-personnel relations and public affairs, nor is it meant merely for macro perspectives. It is therefore extensive as well as intensive and, in its absolute sense, only Allah is the real Governor (*al-mudabbir*), while man is so only in a relative and derivative sense. With reference to man, *tadbīr* so conceptualised can be described as the *intellectual deliberation over the outcome of an affair*, followed either by its implementation if the outcome is praiseworthy or its rejection if the result is estimated to be blameworthy.