

# The Fall of Civilization

(Translated)

<https://www.al-waie.org/archives/article/20242>

Al Waie Magazine Issue No. 477

Fortieth Year, Shawwal 1447 AH corresponding to April 2026 CE

Philosophers of history liken civilization to a decaying ladder, the higher you climb up, the more one of its steps falls, and if you fall from a low height, you will not be harmed, but if you climb several steps, the consequences of the fall will be more serious, and if you reach a certain height, any fall will be fatal. However, the collapse of modern societies is not inevitable, and although historical evidence suggests that their collapse is imminent, we still have an opportunity to learn from the fates of previous societies.

The philosophers of history, who dealt with what they called the recurring rise and fall of civilizations, agree that domestic factors are the most important reasons for the decay and erosion of civilizations and their eventual fall, as they destroy the immunity of the body of the community, causing it to become a fever that allows foreign intervention that comes to form the knockout blow, or the final nail in the coffin of civilization.

The Noble Quran confirms the responsibility of internal factors for the decline that afflicts societies, as they destroy the societal immune system and make it susceptible to attack by outsiders. Allah (swt) said, ﴿أَوَلَمَّا أَصَابَتْكُمْ مُصِيبَةٌ قَدْ أَصَبْتُمْ مِثْلَيْهَا قُلْتُمْ أَنَّى هَذَا قُلْ هُوَ مِنْ عِنْدِ أَنْفُسِكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ﴾ **“And when affliction strikes you, as it struck those before you, you say, ‘How is this?’ Say, ‘It is from yourselves.’ Indeed, Allah is over all things competent.”** [TMQ Surah Aali Imran: 165]. Allah (swt) said, ﴿إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُغَيِّرُ مَا بِقَوْمٍ حَتَّىٰ يُغَيِّرُوا مَا بِأَنْفُسِهِمْ﴾ **“Indeed, Allah does not change the condition of a people until they change what is within themselves.”** [TMQ Surah Ar-Ra’ad: 11]. Allah (swt) said, ﴿ذَٰلِكَ بِأَنَّ اللَّهَ لَمْ يَكُ مُغَيِّرًا نِعْمَةً أَنْعَمَهَا عَلَىٰ قَوْمٍ حَتَّىٰ يُغَيِّرُوا مَا بِأَنْفُسِهِمْ وَأَنَّ اللَّهَ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ﴾ **“That is because Allah would not change a favor which He had bestowed upon a people until they change what is within themselves, and indeed Allah is Hearing and Knowing.”** [TMQ Surah Al-Anfal:53].

The Sunnah of the Prophet (saw) also attributed the collapse of societies to internal factors, as in the hadith of the Prophet (saw) about the people who were on board the safinah (boat), and the hadith of the Prophet (saw) who said, ﴿كُلُّ رَجُلٍ مِنْكُمْ عَلَىٰ ثَغْرَةٍ مِنْ ثَغْرِ الْإِسْلَامِ، اللَّهُ لَا يُؤْتِي الْإِسْلَامَ مِنْ قِبَلِكُمْ﴾ **“Every man among the Muslims stands at a gap among the gaps of Islam; so beware, beware—let not Islam be breached from your side.”** All of these verses and hadiths and their counterparts point to the direct responsibility of individuals and societies for the collapse of civilizations, the decline of states, and the extinction of tribalistic tendencies. As for external factors, no matter how strong and capable they are, they cannot bear fruit unless the internal state of the society in question is favorable.

The Muslim thinker Ibn Khaldun (d. 808 AH) is considered the first to philosophically theorize about the decline of civilizations. In his Muqaddimah, he identified five stages of development of the dawlah (ruling authority), beginning with

the strongest and progressing to the weakest, until it weakens and erodes, then falters and ultimately falls due to purely internal factors.

In his book, "In the Philosophy of History," Professor Khaled Fouad Tahtah states, "Ibn Khaldun is considered the originator of the theory of the cyclical succession of states in the history of human thought, in terms of its general social and philosophical dimensions. He arrived at the conviction of the thought of succession in civilization, the dawlah, in his view, and compared the cyclical nature of change between the individual and society." He adds, "For him, society has a lifespan, like that of a person who is born, then reaches maturity, then ages and dies. On this basis, the state passes through the following stages: nomadism, prosperity, and decline." <sup>(5)</sup>

(Note from Al-Waie Magazine: Ibn Khaldun's discourse on the lifespans, rise, and fall of duwul (ruling authorities) is unrelated to the issue of the emergence, rise, decline, and demise of civilizations. His discussion concerns states which he believes—and his view is open to debate—are formed only through tribal solidarity. For him, a dawlah (ruling authority) is the reign of a family or tribal grouping, such as the Umayyad, Abbasid, Seljuk, and Ayyubid states. The emergence, rise, decline, and demise of these states do not at all imply the emergence and demise of a civilization. All these mentioned duwul arose, rose, and fell within the framework of Islamic civilization, which was not necessarily affected by the rise and fall of one state and the fall of another. Therefore, in his terminology, duwul are the reigns of ruling families, not civilizations, nor even the state in its modern sense.)

Following Ibn Khaldun came other philosophers who followed his lead in proposing the theory of the cyclical succession of civilizations. and the significant role that internal divisions and strife play in tearing societies apart and making them prey to those who covet them. Among the most prominent of these philosophers are Batista Vico (d. 1744), Oswald Spengler (d. 1936), and Arnold Toynbee (d. 1975).

Toynbee, for example, attributes the decline and collapse of civilizations and states primarily to internal factors. He views external factors as merely the exploitation of these internal ones, paving the way for external forces to ultimately destroy the state, the nation, and the civilization. He believes that one of the most prominent internal factors contributing to collapse is the failure of governments to adequately address existing challenges stemming primarily from internal causes.

In his aforementioned book, Professor Khaled Fouad Tahtah states, "Thus, Toynbee explains the collapse of civilizations as the internal disintegration of societies before any external invasion can finish them off. In such cases, external invasion represents the final blow to a society on its deathbed. Therefore, it can be said that no civilization or state can collapse from the outside without first having eroded from within. Indeed, no empire can be conquered from the outside if it has not already committed suicide."

In his book, "The American Empire and the Invasion of Iraq," writer Mohamed Hassanein Heikal speaks about the United States of America, saying, "Although American policy at this moment may appear to Arabs as a surge of reckless and unrestrained violence, this should neither frighten them nor drive them to retreat. One of the most important lessons of history is that great empires endure until they reach

their highest peaks, only to discover that remaining there is exceedingly costly, at which point the signs of inevitable decline begin to emerge. Yet empires resist this reality, and it is then that violence reaches its maximum intensity. This has been the pattern of all empires, including the Roman Empire in antiquity. Indeed, the great empires of history are not ultimately defeated by their enemies in direct confrontation, but rather defeat themselves through excess, arrogance, and an inability to keep pace with change, imagining their dominance to be permanent.”

Anyone observing the state of the Western world and its capitalist systems today will find that they are grappling with internal problems that have begun to surface and become apparent. They are undergoing significant changes and transformations due to the financial crisis resulting from the drop in oil prices and the persisting effect of the coronavirus pandemic. Furthermore, these societies are based on individualism and a materialistic outlook. Capitalism is founded on the separation of religion from life; this thought is its core tenet. Based on this ideological principle, individuals are the ones who establish their own systems of life. Therefore, they believe it is essential to preserve human freedoms, including freedom of belief, freedom of expression, freedom of ownership, and personal liberty.

The democracy that implements the ideology stems from the thought that individuals create their own systems. Consequently, the people are the source of authority. It is the people that establishes the systems, appoints the ruler to govern it, and removes him whenever it wishes, imposing the system it desires. For them, governance is a contract between the people and the ruler, who governs according to the system the people establish.

The events in America and the Western world prompt us to ask: Has capitalism and the Western world reached the stage of civilizational decline and collapse? Will the American people’s opposition to their government’s policies be one of the internal factors that lead to America’s weakness, shrinking influence, and decline in the world, and specifically in the Middle East? Assuming this is the case: which powers are likely to enter the Middle East with their influence, instead of America? Or will the Middle East and the Muslim World return to leading the world with its ‘Aqeedah (doctrine) from which its system emanates, enabling it to achieve happiness for humanity, after the materialistic tendency has overwhelmed the world, and moral values have collapsed?

Certainly, the world today needs a people to carry a civilizational project built upon an ‘Aqeedah from which its system emanates, which has the ability of solving the political, economic, and social problems facing the Ummah, and working to unify it under the Rayah banner of the Khilafah Rashidah (Rightly Guided Caliphate) on the Method of the Prophethood.

#### **Sources:**

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