

USWAH HASANAH COUNTRY OF KHALIFAH UMAR ABDUL AZIZ: AN ISLAMIC POLITICAL ECONOMY RESEARCH

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Abstract

Khalifah Umar Abdul Aziz was renowned as a great leader in implementing an Islamic based government. His country was among the countries that served as a guide for forming a system of government in accordance to Islam. His country was fit to be declared as an *Uswah Hasanah* country (good role model country). Khalifah Umar Abdul Aziz himself as an *Uswah hasanah* could be considered as a measurement of success of his *Uswah Hasanah* country, compared with the government before and after his. Since good governance is important, the question is, can an *Uswah Hasanah* country, implemented under the governance of Khalifah Umar Abdul Aziz, be emulated today? This article aimed to answer this question by analyzing the approach of *uswah hasanah* country of Khalifah Umar Abdul Aziz based on the implementation of Islamic political economy in his government. In order to achieve the goal, this article was written utilizing the method of documents analysis in order to gather secondary data. The data was then analyzed using the method of content analysis. As a result, it was found that *uswah hasanah* of Khalifah Umar Abdul Aziz affected the formation of *Uswah Hasanah* country based on his implementation of Islamic political economy. The application of this approach involved two subject matters. Firstly, the implications of political *uswah hasanah* of Khalifah Umar Abdul Aziz on the economy of the *Uswah Hasanah* country; and secondly, the implications of economic *uswah hasanah* of Khalifah Umar Abdul Aziz on the politics of the *Uswah Hasanah* country.

Keywords: *Uswah Hasanah* Country, Islamic Political Economy, Khalifah Umar Abdul Aziz

Introduction

Generally, not one person had yet conducted a research on the implementation of Islamic political economy during the reign of Khalifah Umar Abdul Aziz. In this article, the aim was to examine the approach of political *uswah hasanah* of Khalifah Umar towards the economy of *Uswah Hasanah* country and the approach of economic *uswah hasanah* of Khalifah Umar towards the politics of *Uswah Hasanah* country. This was in reference to the definition of

Islamic political economy as discussed by Mohd Rosdi (2014: 35), which was an interaction between the philosophy of Islamic economy and the philosophy of Islamic politics, implemented based on the concepts of justice and welfare, *amar makruf nahi mungkar*, *ubudiyah* and *uluhiyah* as well as the responsibility as a caliph and servant of Allah SWT, which ultimately aims for *Mardhatillah*.

Khalifah Umar Abdul Aziz was among the Islamic leaders who were exemplary in fulfilling their roles as a ruler. He was a role model in the implementation of Islamic political economy. The political economy in his government was not the same as nowadays conventional political economy. What had Khalifah Umar Abdul Aziz actually implemented that he was considered such an *uswah hasanah*? This issue attracted the attention of the researcher to examine the *uswah hasanah* of Khalifah Umar Abdul Aziz in building an *Uswah Hasanah* country. Hence, this research adapted the Islamic political economy of his government as a measurement for the construction of the country.

Various approaches of *uswah hasanah* were implemented in his government. These approaches had implications on the economy and politics of the governance of Khalifah Umar Abdul Aziz. This article was divided into two parts of discussion. Firstly, the implications of political *uswah hasanah* of Khalifah Umar Abdul Aziz on the economy of *Uswah Hasanah* country; and secondly, the implications of economic *uswah hasanah* of Khalifah Umar Abdul Aziz on the politics of *Uswah Hasanah* country.

The Interaction of Political *Uswah Hasanah* of Khalifah Umar Abdul Aziz with Economy in Building an *Uswah Hasanah* Country

Khalifah Umar Abdul Aziz was well-known as a ruler who implemented a system of government based on Islam. His implementation was considered a success compared with his predecessors or successors (Mohd Saufee, 2015). This involved the implementation of economic and political approaches based on the *uswah hasanah* of Khalifah Umar Abdul Aziz himself. He established that the government should be managed based on the Quran and Sunnah (Al-Shallabi, 2010). His personality and character as a Muslim formed the guideline in selecting his workforces as well as implementing all affairs and other matters (Muhammad Tahir, 2013). During his tenure as the Caliph, he had set two conditions in his office. First, he worked based on truth and applied aspects of justice in his governance, he would not oppress and persecute anyone in managing the *Bayt al-Mal*; second, he divided the national wealth to his subjects in Madinah. These conditions were accepted by Khalifah al-Walid. Khalifah Umar Abdul Aziz then performed his duty well. The people of Madinah welcomed him with joy (Al-Shallabi, 2010: 35). This event had proven that Khalifah Umar Abdul Aziz used his political power in managing economic matters and the welfare of his subjects, so that they may live peacefully and prosperously.

Besides, after Khalifah Umar Abdul Aziz was appointed as the caliph, he ascended the pulpit and delivered a speech (Al-Shallabi, 2010: 58-60; Matsom, 1993). He said:

““O People! I have been burdened with this task without my opinion, or desire, and without consultation with the Muslims [that is, without the input of the Ummah’s *shura*]. I hereby set you free of the [yoke of] allegiance to me that is around your necks. You are free to choose for yourself.”

Then the people answered with one voice:

“O *Amir al-Mu'minin*, we have chosen you, we accepted you, please lead us with goodness and blessings.”

Through this event, it was proven that he felt burdened with the responsibility that was given to him and considered it as a test from Allah SWT. Khalifah Umar Abdul Aziz had also suggested that the people should appoint another leader. However, the people unanimously agreed to appoint Khalifah Umar Abdul Aziz as their leader and hoped to be led to goodness and blessings through his leadership (Matsom, 1993). He had sent letters to the people throughout the whole country asking them to pledge their allegiance to him. This method resulted in obtaining the agreements of everyone in the society to support and have faith in him. At the time, this could indirectly secure his position as a ruler.

During his era, he selected his personnels based on the qualification and expertise instead of through cronyism or family relation (Abdul Ghani Azmi, 2013). His action affected the economy of the country. As a result, workers were not discriminated and resources were not given only to certain family or group of people (Arshad & Abdul Ghani Azmi, 2015). Properties were then owned by those who were eligible in their field of expertise and distributed to all of his subjects resulting in the decrease of unemployment and poverty. This in turn could strengthened the economy of the country.

Khalifah Umar Abdul Aziz also restored the *shura* council that was abolished by his grandfather, Muawiyah. The *shura* council was a national legislative council, which served to assist Islamic leaders in ruling a country based on the laws of Allah SWT. Each decision was made through discussions with Islamic scholars and *fiqh* experts of their respective fields (Al-Shallabi, 2010: 65; Razak, 2010: 296). His actions and decisions were based on prior agreement of Islamic scholars and *fiqh* experts, i.e. implementation was only possible when mutual agreement was achieved (Daud, 1994: 172). These verdicts included matters regarding politics, economy, social, and so on. Decisions were made by taking into account the needs and welfare of the people in the country (Razak, 2010: 297). When an economic system was managed based on discussions of Islamic scholars, *fiqh* experts and other authorities, economic issues such as price increases, high taxes, and etc. can be reduced in the future. National security can also be maintained because there was no pressure on the poor and so, rebellion would not occur in the country. The image of a country could be tainted should a rebellion occur.

In addition, he also stated that any of his officers or workers who performed acts of tyranny in his government should fear Allah SWT and report such wrongdoings to him (Pramandhika, 2011; Al-Shallabi, 2010: 36). Any wrongdoing would be first investigated by Khalifah Umar Abdul Aziz. If they were found guilty, he would sentence a punishment suitable with the offense. This demonstrated that each of his action was referred to Allah SWT and reflected that he was obedient to Allah SWT (Pramandhika, 2011). Through this policy, Khalifah Umar Abdul Aziz had abandoned the practice of hereditary monarchy that was employed by most caliphs from Bani Umayyah and adapted the practice of *shura* and the appointment of ruler through the *bai'at* of those who were in agreement (Al-Shallabi, 2010: 66). As a result, the people and his subordinates obeyed his commands and this in turn facilitated the administration of his county. The impact on economy would be no more deviation of resources from certain people because of their fear of the law of Allah SWT. All

personnels performed their job with sincerity, honesty, trust, and obedience to the law of Allah SWT in managing economy.

During his reign of two and a half years, he applied three forms of *uswah hasanah* in his government which were trustworthiness, justice, and reviving the principle of *amar makruf nahi mungkar*. All three forms of *uswah hasanah* were discussed in detail below.

The Trustworthiness of Khalifah Umar Abdul Aziz

The *Uswah hasanah* that was demonstrated by Khalifah Umar Abdul Aziz in his government was trustworthiness. There were various *uswah hasanah* that were shown by Khalifah Umar Abdul Aziz. Among them was his trustworthiness in leading and assigning national duties to those who were trustworthy (Jusoh & Jasmi, 2006). This was illustrated in Figure 1.

Khalifah Umar Abdul Aziz was burdened by his responsibilities as a caliph. He requested for his governors to select competent and capable individuals to be handed the tasks of managing the Muslim. As a result, the works of each of his personnel were completed with trust and the resources or people's rights in the country were never abused (Che Pa, t.t; Al-Shallabi, 2010).

The principle of Khalifah Umar Abdul Aziz in refraining himself from obtaining the wealth of the Muslim was not only applied on himself, but also on his governors, family members, and subordinates (Al-Hakam, 2009). This example should be applied by every leader and civilian in order to deter greed. Khalifah Umar Abdul Aziz had led his subjects with love and steered them away from the habit of begging from others. This method was also a way to encourage the people to work hard in managing their economy to the extent that they could stand on their own, independent of anyone. This action could lead to *qanaah* in each of his subject and decrease their desire to pursuit wealth in life. This would stabilize the economy of the country due to the lack of struggle for economic monopoly. The people would be safe from oppression due to fraud in weighing, inflation of market prices, fraud in the quality of goods, and so on. The people could then own high quality goods at reasonable prices.

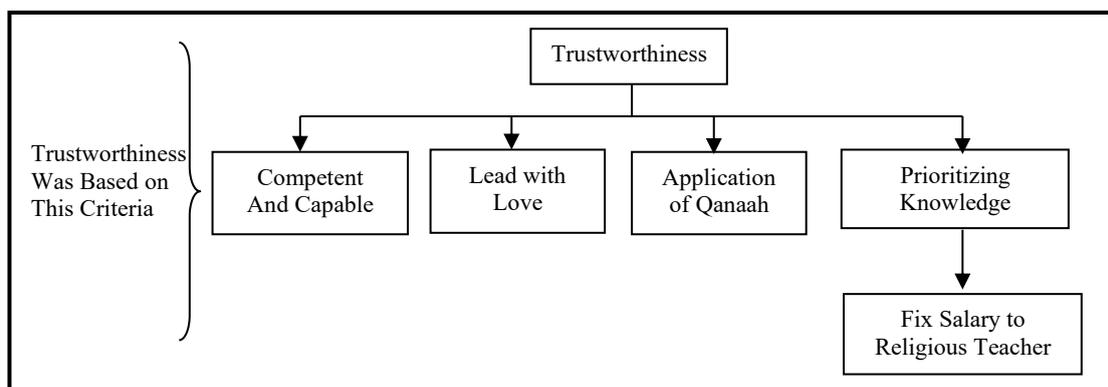


Figure 1: Khalifah Umar Abdul Aziz's Method of Trustworthiness

Khalifah Umar Abdul Aziz had set five conditions for anyone that wanted to contact him, or work for him. First, he provided a middleman that could connect him with the people. Through this method, he was able to recognize the need of his people and fulfil them; second, they in turn could help him in establishing goodness and warn him against tyranny; third, those that were close to him should lead him towards goodness by inviting him to do good deeds; fourth, those who were close to him were forbidden from *ghibah* in front of him; and fifth, those who were close to him should not meddle in matters of government and other

matters that did not concern them (Al-Shallabi, 2010: 34). This had enabled him to cooperate with his subjects in Islamic based economic administration and any other issues in the country, which strengthened his relationship with his subjects and his position as a leader due to the good relationship between the government and its subjects.

In addition, Khalifah Umar Abdul Aziz strived to work following the guideline of the Quran and Sunnah. His actions and works were based on the Quran and the Sunnah of Rasulullah SAW. He spread knowledge among his people in order for them to understand their religion. This was because, the characteristic of trustworthiness and responsibility in managing the economy and politics of a country is highly important in Islam (Suhid, 2007: 170; Mohd Rosdi, 2013: 140). This was successfully implemented due to Khalifah Umar Abdul Aziz's depth of understanding on the matter of preserving the religion. He considered educating his subjects on the basic of religion and guiding them in practicing it as his primary responsibilities (Al-Shallabi, 2010: 62-63). Problems of moral decadence was also reduced resulting in respectable citizens and lack of corruption in economic administration of the country (Suhid, 2007: 170).

Khalifah Umar Abdul Aziz also instructed the scholars to travel to each state, town and village in order to teach his people and help them understand the religion. This was the duty and responsibility of each man in managing every matter in life, including the economy, politics, and social, based on Islam as it is the responsibility of mankind as the caliph and servant of Allah SWT (Salleh, 2003). He requested every governor of each town to encourage Islamic scholars to share their knowledge. In order to realize this goal, Khalifah Umar Abdul Aziz had set a salary for the scholars so that they could focus their full attention on sharing their knowledge to the people (Al-Shallabi, 2010). This approach had indirectly generated interest, responsibility, and earnestness among Islamic scholars in teaching the people. Consequently, the people were not left behind in terms of knowledge and thus, able to perform their duty with trust, responsibility, and knowledge. Once the people were filled with religious knowledge, every decision in managing economy was made carefully, taking into account its future impact on the country.

The Justice of Khalifah Umar Abdul Aziz

The second *Uswah hasanah* that was applied by Khalifah Umar Abdul Aziz in his government was justice. There were two parts of justice. First, preventing tyranny and steering it away from the oppressed by preventing the violation of human rights involving their life, honour, and properties, eliminating the effect of those violations, returning their rights, and punishing the violators according to Islamic law; second, a proactive justice. This was mostly regarding a country. A country should fulfill the rights of its people in order to maintain their well-being so that not a single person was neglected, weak, and poor (Che Pa, 2013). Khalifah Umar Abdul Aziz had fulfilled this obligation seamlessly. He considered his responsibility as a caliph as fulfilling the citizen's rights and obeying the conditions of *bai'at*.

Khalifah Umar Abdul Aziz implemented his justice by restoring the rights of his people. Khalifah Umar Abdul Aziz had returned strips of land to their original owners. This was because, he had a principle, which was to confidently eliminate any doubts so that he was sure that all of his belongings contained no *syubhat* of imposing on the rights of others (Che Pa, 2013: 1-9; Al-Shallabi, 2010: 70). Khalifah Umar Abdul Aziz freed himself from acquired wealth such as land and other properties through various method such as selling them. During the reign of Khalifah Umar Abdul Aziz as a caliph, he sold his properties that were not needed such as slaves, clothing, and perfumes. The prices of those properties were up to twenty three

thousand dinar and Khalifah Umar used the money for the sake of Allah or he freed himself by returning those properties to the rightful owners. This action was done on the strips of land that were given to him by Bani Umaiyah (Matsom, 1993; Al-Shallabi, 2010: 71). The return of properties back to the original owners helped them achieved independence in managing their household economy. As an example, returning land ownership may lead to profitable development of the land through farming, animal husbandry, and building residential areas. This allowed the owner to independently earn a living.

Once Khalifah Umar Abdul Aziz had cleansed himself by returning the properties such as land, farms, and others to the rightful owners, the next step that he took was to inspect the properties of his family members which were his cousins and relatives from Bani Umaiyah. After the burial of his cousin, Sulaiman bin Abdul Malik, Khalifah Umar Abdul Aziz discovered that his other cousins had been spending large amount of money in order to appear luxurious in front of his people. They spent money on vehicles, new clothes, perfumes, and cosmetics. To him, all of these were unreasonable waste and extravagances that were covered through *Bayt al-Mal*. Khalifah Umar Abdul Aziz had acted by returning all of those properties to *Bayt al-Mal* (Matsom, 1993; Al-Shallabi, 2010: 83). This demonstrated that he had used his role as a leader in order to manage the economy and return the properties back to the rightful owner. All of these wealth were then distributed among the *fakir*, *miskin*, *gharimin*, *ibn Sabil*, *fisabilillah*, and etc. The wealth can be used to support their daily lives. Consequently, their fortune would be assured and the number of the poor would be decreased as everyone in the country would strive to change their lives for the better.

Khalifah Umar Abdul Aziz were also just to the *dzimmah*, in which he instructed that the *dzimmah* should not be treated recklessly and their places of worship should not be destroyed. Khalifah Umar Abdul Aziz forbade his governors from demolishing churches and temples of the Magians as the Muslim had already made peace with them (Al-Hakam, 2009). This approach had led to a sense of respect towards other religion within the multi-religious society and had also maintain the security within the country due to inter-religious understanding. Indirectly, Islam became well-known and studied by other faiths. In the long term, Islam would spread to the people of other faiths leading to its rapid growth until today (W. Ali, 2010: 4-12). While in the management of economy, its implementation would be based on Islamic laws that fulfill the needs and welfare of the people (Razak, 2010).

Reviving *Amar Makruf Nahi Mungkar*

The third *Uswah hasanah* of Khalifah Umar Abdul Aziz was reviving *amar makruf nahi mungkar*. It succeeded because it was based on his deep devotion to Allah SWT and his search for the pleasure of Allah SWT in each of his action. This was accomplished when he assumed his position as a *tabi'in* scholar and an *imam* of *ijtihad*. Khalifah Umar Abdul Aziz highly value religion and morality of his subjects. The personality of Khalifah Umar Abdul Aziz who was just provided profound examples and influences to the society including their inclinations, desires and interests (Suhid, 2007: 169-174). Khalifah Umar Abdul Aziz was not content with upholding the religion only in his own country.

He also paid his attention to the non-Muslim community by inviting them to embrace Islam through letters to the kings of India and the nation across the river. He wrote that if they embraced Islam, their rights and obligations will be similar to the Muslim, and thus, many of them embraced Islam and changed their names to Arabic names (Al-Shallabi, 2010).

His people worked based on the laws of Allah SWT. They managed the economy well leading to the decrease in criminal activities as the people changed for the better. Matters

regarding economy were managed with trust, justice, and responsibility as outlined in Islam. There were no racial disunity and internal or external rebellion due to the sense of understanding and respect that existed within the community (W. Ali, 2010: 4-12). The country's economy could also be maintained.

The Interaction of Economic *Uswah Hasanah* of Khalifah Umar Abdul Aziz with Politics in Building the *Uswah Hasanah* Country

With his possession of economic power, Khalifah Umar Abdul Aziz were able to direct the national economy into an economic *uswah hasanah*. Khalifah Umar Abdul Aziz used various approaches of economic *uswah hasanah* in his government. He reduced his own salary to increase the salary of his officers (Sungit & Ahmad, 2014: 3-8). Khalifah Umar Abdul Aziz decided not to take even a little bit of the *fa-i* (property from the non-Muslims or their country). He would not take a single part of the property except for the part that was taken with the Muslims (Al-Hakam, 2009: 32-33). This described the watchfulness of Khalifah Umar Abdul Aziz and could be followed as an example by his people. Khalifah Umar Abdul Aziz collected all of his properties except for those in Suwaida and returned them as the properties of the Muslims. He worked the land using his own salary with the Muslims. Then, he distributed the harvests, Ajwah dates (cold and healthy), to the public (Al-Hakam, 2009: 35). In a political view, this action fulfilled the right of the public as workers in certain fields and created a good relationship between the government and its people so that they respected each other and no misunderstanding could arise (Sungit & Ahmad, 2014: 3-8). Without the sense of respect between the rulers and their subject, disunity and rebellion could affect national politics.

Khalifah Umar Abdul Aziz realized that social gap within a community could arise due to injustice in national wealth distribution. So, with his role as a caliph at the time, he set a new method to elevate the status of the poor and oppressed. In order to realize the goal, he implemented various methods. Firstly, he forbade the governors and government officials to use public funds as business capital; secondly, he increased his donations and attentions towards the disadvantaged and the poor by warranting their sufficiency level through *zakat*; and thirdly, he ordered the government to pay the debts of the debtors (Al-Shallabi, 2010: 462).

Khalifah Umar Abdul Aziz strived to achieve economic growth and social prosperity. He prepared a conducive climate for the economic growth for national stability, eradicated defamation, and returned the rights of the rightful (Che Pa, 2013: 9). Khalifah Umar Abdul Aziz constructed general facilities in accordance to economic development. Examples of these facilities were roads, administration buildings, water tunnel, river, bridges, public transports, and so on for the use of his subjects (Mohd Nor, 2010: 82; Ahmad, 1984: 55-56). This encouraged the public to trade and multiply their wealth whether on land or across the sea. The growth in economic sector led to a good diplomatic relationship with other countries. As a result, many non-Muslims embraced Islam (Mohd Nor, 2010: 82). This indirectly resulted in the growth of Islamic *dakwah*. He also prioritized agriculture that contributed a sum of wealth to the country (Al-Shallabi, 2010: 463).

In addition, Khalifah Umar Abdul Aziz managed matters regarding *zakat*. He distributed the wealth in *Bayt al-Mal* to the *fakir*, *miskin*, *gharimin*, *muallaf* and so on. This distribution lead to contentment among his people. This could be proven when an officer from Africa could not find a single person who wanted to or was eligible to receive *zakat* (Mohd Nor, 2010: 83). The subjects of Khalifah Umar Abdul Aziz were all content with the own

wealth (Al-Hakam, 2009: 64-65). Rebellion, demonstration, and internal or external war were prevented as the rights and welfare of his people were perfectly taken care of and thus, the political position of the ruler was maintained.

Khalifah Umar Abdul Aziz was also able to solve the problem regarding *fa-ie*. Initially, this problem was also faced by his grandfather, Khalifah Umar al- Khattab. Later on, Khalifah Umar Abdul Aziz followed his grandfather's solution by distributing the properties to the orphans, *fakir*, *miskin*, and *ibn sabil*. This action prevented from the pooling of properties among the rich (Al-Hakam, 2008: 70). This had proven that Khalifah Umar Abdul Aziz really cared for the welfare of his people by distributing wealth to the poor. This action stabilized the economy and strengthened national politics as his subjects trusted his government.

In economy, Khalifah Umar Abdul Aziz had also established that if any debtors died, the debt would be paid from the resources of *Bayt al-Mal*. He also decided that any excess wealth after paying the salary of his army should be given to debtors or those who had no earning. Any excess afterwards should be given to the *dzimmah* (Al-Hakam, 2009: 62-63). This prevented life stresses among the public that were due to economic problems that afflicted a family or the unfortunates. If the problems of his people were not addressed, the rate of criminal activities will increase and subsequently tainted the reputation of his government and country (Sulaiman & Hashim, 2011: 492-493).

All of these Islamic based economic and political implementations were applied by Khalifah Umar Abdul Aziz based on his moral and principles so that they were in accordance to the laws of Allah SWT. This could be considered as *uswah hasanah* in a system of government because no serious issue was encountered in his government during the era of Khalifah Umar Abdul Aziz. These measures of economic and political implementations should be applied in a system of government as there were various *uswah hasanah* demonstrated by Khalifah Umar Abdul Aziz in managing his country. The summary was depicted in Figure 2.

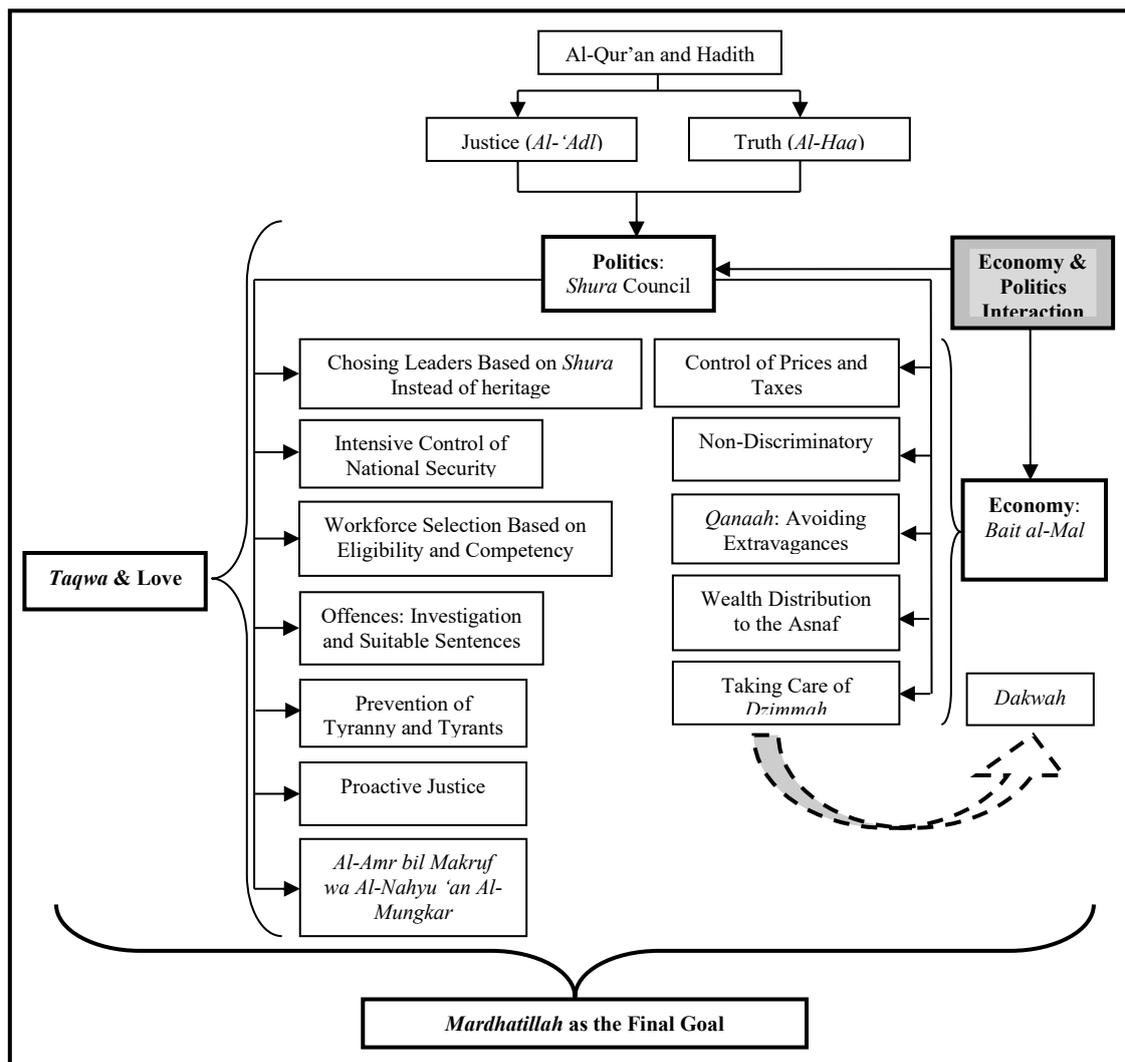


Figure 2: Conceptual framework of *Uswah Hasanah* of Khalifah Umar Abdul Aziz’s Islamic Political Economy in the Development of *Uswah Hasanah* Country

Conclusion

As the conclusion, Khalifah Umar Abdul Aziz was a figure with *uswah hasanah*. He introduced various reformations in his government. He revived a system of government based on shura and *musyawarah*. This concept allowed all matters regarding economy to be discussed prior to making appropriate decision in a government. He applied this concept by obtaining the agreement of everyone in the community from all over the country, states, cities, and villages. He also guided his subjects towards the truth with love and emphasized on the obligation of mankind in obedience to the laws of Allah SWT. For him, goodness in life can only be achieved through obedience and faith in Allah SWT. Without obedience and faith in Allah SWT, it would be difficult to attain goodness in life. The *uswah hasanah* that was implemented in the government of Khalifah Umar Abdul Aziz can be emulated and applied in a government. This clarified that his country was indeed the *Uswah Hasanah* country.

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