

ISLAM AND THE NEW WORLD ORDER

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For over a billion Muslims the New World Order, which former U.S. President George Bush advocated at the end of the Cold War, has suffered a still-born death. Iraq's disastrous attack on Kuwait and America's subsequent orchestration of the Gulf War in 1990-91 allegedly heralded this new order. A number of assertions were made by the sole remaining superpower: in the future, no aggressor would be allowed to proceed unpunished; occupation by force would not be tolerated; international boundaries would not be permitted to undergo arbitrary changes; human rights would, indeed, have to become a universal. Norm; violations of these basic rights would be brought to an end; and the United Nations would assume a new role of global peace-keeper. The implementation of these principles would bring mankind into a new era of democracy and security.

Who would not subscribe to such high ideals? The real question, however, is: are those who wield political power in the world today serious about these principles or is the use of such slogans merely an avenue to pursue their own vested interests?

The Muslim World: Past and Present

Muslims constitute over one fifth of the global population, numbering approximately 1.2 billion. Fifty-three independent Muslim states boast a populace of over 800 million Muslims. Islam has also established a strong presence in Europe and the United States, where Islam is second only to Christianity in terms of adherents.

Islam, however, remains the most misunderstood religion in the West. Although it preaches peace and just, many commentators have misrepresented it as a religion of war and fanaticism. People who disdain the rise of Islam have, unfortunately, swept aside Islam's highly productive past — a past that was based on Islam's dominant role in world politics for over a thousand years. Historically, Islamic civilization provided a haven of peace and security for its citizens, including non-Muslims. Even those who suffered persecution outside of the Islamic world's boundaries were given refuge.

Robert Briffault, author of *The Making of Humanity*, examined the Muslim state and society's legacy: "Theocracy in the East has not been intellectually tyrannical or coercive. We do not find there the obscurantism, the holding down of thought, and the perpetual warfare against intellectual revolt, which is such a familiar feature of the European world with Greece and Rome at its back¹."

1. Briffault. Robert. *The Making of Humanity*. 1st edition, London 1919, reprint Lahore 1980, Islamic Book Foundation, p. 113.

Cambridge historian, T.W. Arnold, in his pioneering research work *The Preaching of Islam* records Muslim justice and words: "When the Muslim army reached the valley of the Jordan and Abu Ubaydah pitched his camp at Fihl, the Christian inhabitants of the country wrote to the Arabs, saying: 'O Muslims, we prefer you to the Byzantines, though they are of our own faith, because you keep better faith with us and are more merciful to us and refrain from doing us injustice and your rule over us is better than theirs, for they have robbed us of our goods and our homes. The people of Emessa closed the gates of their city against the army of Herculious and told the Muslims that they preferred their government and justice to the injustice and oppression of the Greeks²."

During the last three centuries, with the advent of Western colonial domination, the situation of parity between Muslims and others has changed. Colonialism brought degradation and humiliation to most of what is now termed the Third World, particularly to the Islamic World — a region regarded with contempt by the Crusader mentality of imperialism. Arnold Toynbee accurately summarized the new relationship:

"In the encounter between the world and the West that has been going on by now for four or five hundred years, the world, not the West, is the party that, up to now, has had the significant experience. It has not been the West that has been hit by the world; it is the world that has been hit — and hit hardly — by the West.... The West, the world will say, has been the arch-aggressor of modern times. And certainly the world's judgment on the West does seem to be justified over a period of about four and a half centuries ending in 1950³."

The West claimed to be on a humanitarian mission when it entered the Third World. Its actions/however, evinced the hypocrisy of its alleged idealistic goals. Phillip K. Hitti, a prominent historian, commenting on Western contemporary history, stated:

"Unfortunately during the last decade or two in particular, the impact of the West has not been all for the good. There is striking contrast between the humanitarian ideas professed by Western missionaries, teachers and preachers, the disregard of human values by European and American politicians and warriors; a disparity between word and deed; an overemphasis on economic and nationalistic values. The behavior of the so-called advanced nations during the last two world wars waged on a scale unknown in history; the ability of Western man to let loose these diabolic forces which are the product of his science and his machine and which now threaten the world with destruction and with particular relation to the Near East, ---

2. Arnold T.W., *The Preaching of Islam: A History of the Propagation of the Muslim Faith*. 1st edition Lahore, 2nd edition 1913. reprint Sh. Mohammad Ashraf Lahore 1975, p. 55

3. Toynbee, Arnold. *The World and the West*. BBC Reith Lectures. .London, p. 1-4

the handling of the Palestine problem by America, England, France and other nations — all these have worked together to disillusion this man of the Near East who has been trying to establish an intellectual rapprochement with the West. It is these actions of the West which alienate him and shake his belief in the character of the Western man and his morality on both the private and public levels⁴.”

The farce, however, becomes more ironic in the current relationship between the West and Islamists. The latter — coming from a background of material weakness, economic deprivations, technological impotence and military incapacity — are portrayed as a threat to the West. The West deems their efforts to rediscover their identity eradicate corruption and establish the people's will in government a challenge to its interests. Western observers have created the chimera of Islamic "fundamentalism" in response to the Islamists' innocuous quest for democratic reform. Former U. S. Presidents, such as Richard Nixon, *Seize the Moment* and Ronald Reagan *An American Life* has perpetuated the theme of an Islamic threat. Similarly, intellectuals like Francis Fukuyama, author of *The End of History and the last Man*, and columnists such as Richard Pfaff exaggerate an Islamic monolith looming over the West, preparing to strike.

Seeing the rise of political Islamic consciousness for what it really is eludes most observers, yet some pragmatic observers have been more realistic about the Islamic resurgence. Edward Mortimer, Foreign Affairs Editor for the *Financial Times*, notes that Islamic groups in North Africa have shown no evidence of posing a threat to Europe. He states:

“Statements or insinuations from European leaders or observers to the effect that Islam (or 'fundamentalism', a term which is sometimes used almost synonymously) has replaced communism as the main threat to the West are not merely baseless, but dangerous and even potentially self-fulfilling....The fact that these [Islamic] parties wish to reduce or even eradicate what they see as corrupting Western moral or cultural influences within their own societies does not mean there will be an inevitable conflict of interest between them and Europe⁵.”

Unfortunately, few policy makers have adopted the wisdom of Mortimer's observations. The global Islamic resurgence is a reality; yet it does not advocate expansion or warfare, internally or on foreign soil. During the colonial era, Muslim ideology, economy, politics, culture and morale suffered considerably. Thus, with the political independence of their states, they seek to rekindle their own faith, values and heritage. The Islamist quest for democratic reform aims to restore to the Muslim world their dignity and honor, rather than to perpetuate a system of government that operates as a "client-state" for external powers.

4. Hitti, Philip K. "Current Trends in Islam." In *Islam and the Modern World* Washington, D.C.: The Middle East Institute, p. 7-8

5. Mortimer Edward, *European Security after the Cold War*, Adelphi Paper 271, London: Brassey's, summer 1992, P. 36-38.

The Fundamentalist Bogey

Fundamentalism, as a religious concept, is a distinctly Christian phenomenon, having no place in Islamic thought. Secularists in the United States affixed the term to evangelists who: a) espoused a literal interpretation of the Bible, b) sought the implementation of Christian ethics to all aspects of life, and c) criticized certain aspects of Western life which they saw as deviations from the Christian ethos. The nation's secularization process vis-a-vis Protestant ideology increasingly marginalized these groups, labeling them extremists, fanatics and fundamentalists.

The attempt to apply "fundamentalism" to Muslims is highly inappropriate, particularly since its usage smacks of ethnocentrism. It has been applied without consideration of culture, context or reality. Whereas the Christian world has advocated the separation of Church and State, Muslims have not made this distinction (although secular elites have tried to force this concept on their people).

Furthermore, the drive to attribute violence in the Islamic world to "fundamentalism" is a misnomer. If some Muslims engage in violent acts, it is mostly as a response to the subjugation imposed by secular tyrannies. Violence may occur in any society; particularly where the people will is not sufficiently addressed. The riot in Los Angeles, unexpected by so many White Americans, was the direct result of ignoring the Black community's plight. When the Conservative party in England introduced the Poll Tax, riots broke out in central London, something virtually alien to that metropolitan city. Race, color, language, life-style, ideology — all of these elements lead to different variations of violence and fanaticism. Therefore, when disaffected people in the Muslim world act violently, it is a mistake to invoke Islamic "fundamentalism".

Islam the West and Hypocrisy

Muslims, while on their quest for self-assertion, have been amazed at the double standards demonstrated by leaders in the West. If the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait was a crime, then of equal iniquity are the Israeli occupation of Palestine, the Indian annexation of Kashmir and the Serbian "ethnic cleansing" of Bosnia Herzegovina. When some Islamists, pitted against their respective governments, resort to violence they are censured ignoring the state-violence which happens to be the cause by such violent reactions. The use of violence by the state, however, is a far more heinous crime, particularly when applied by repressive regimes that abuse their powers to corner, taunt and brutalize individuals with opposing views. Western policy is hypocritical because it selectively challenges despots, i.e. democracy is deemed a right only in so far as it applies to secular elites acculturated in Western norms.

Thus, a number of Western leaders have no qualms about (silently) supporting electoral sabotage in a number of Muslim countries that are run by secularized elites. - Egyptians, Algerians and Indonesians have as much a claim to democratic rule as any other people. Prior to Turkey's

intervention during the 1970s in Cyprus, Western powers remained mute when Turkish Cypriots were subject to discrimination, persecution and, in certain areas, liquidation. Great Britain, which had a military base on Cyprus, failed to carry out its role as a protector of peace. Yet when Turkey entered the fray, however, it was condemned, and has not been forgiven!

Furthermore, Western passivity throughout 1992, when Serbs ravaged the Muslims, and to a lesser degree the Croats, is a glaring testament to Western inequity. The political and military might of the United States, the European Community, the United Nations and NATO remained confined to perfunctory threats. Yet when Muslim volunteers went to aid Bosnian Muslims, they appeared in the media as rabble-rousers and fundamentalists. The alacrity with which Muslims are "fanaticized" by Western observers will not, however, alter the geo-political realities. Pronouncements of a fundamentalist threat serve only in "encouraging Muslims to believe that the West is planning a new aggression against the Islamic world⁶."

The West must take a hard look at itself and realize that economic and cultural imperialism are no less destructive than political imperialism. Islamic movements are not opposed to modernity. They merely want to achieve it within the context of their society's culture and values. Muslims disapprove of other nation's hegemony over their affairs. A Pax Americana is no less abhorrent than a Pax Britannica. The United States in particular, as the sole superpower on the global stage, must become more sensitized to the fears of less developed states that see the U.S. embarking on a new imperial order. In so doing, the U.S. is willing to ignore the suppression of democracy when it seems that the opposition will not bend to its will.

Islam and Democracy

A number of scholars and politicians allege that Islam is anathema to democracy. This notion was borne out of a selective analysis of Islamic tenets regarding government. The Islamic formula affirms the sovereignty of God, and consequently the need for divine guidance in worldly affairs; yet Islamic doctrines also consist of an elaborate framework to ensure the fair governance of the people. Ideally, rule is administered by the khalifah, or viceroy. The khalifah seat of power is attained via popular support, without regard to ethnic or class preference. Divine law, which allows for considerable flexibility and change, provides the basic framework for rule. Government is shared by implementing a combination of shura (consultation), ijma' (consensus), and ijtihad (independent reasoning).

Thus, it becomes evident that the authority to rule cannot be confined to one religious sect or political ideology. The members of an Islamic society are obligated to give the reins of power to whomever they trust the principle of government accountability to the people is also cardinal to the Islamic system. Therefore, the people have the right to disagree and dissent.

6. Mortimer Edward. *European Security after the Cold War*. Adelphi Paper 271. London: Brassey's, summer 1992, p. 36.

Democracy — although not the democracy of the United States or Europe — is a basic concept in Islamic government. What Islamic movements are attempting to establish in the political field should not be confused with the way some regimes operate, particularly those invoking Islamic symbolism to legitimize their grasp on, power.

The Islamic political order defines itself as a democratic system inseparable from divine guidance. Sayyid Abul A'la Mawdudi, a pioneer of the contemporary Islamic resurgence, described Islamic polity as a Theo-democracy. This definition repudiates the concept of a theocracy because such government is restrictive in its scope, i.e. it confines the leadership to a particular religious class who reserve the right to interpret religious law and wield political power. A Theo-democracy, however, establishes the basic rules of law, much like a constitution; and from these essential principles appropriate laws are implemented, similar to the amendments-made to the U.S. constitution and laws framed by Congress under the constitution. In spite of the democratic ideals espoused by Islamic movements, their suppression is applauded and the thievery of their popularly-elected leadership is denied, such as in Algeria.

The Islamic Resurgence and the New World Order

The Islamic resurgence is unique in the universality of its character. Political ideologies have struggled to achieve similar unity, yet all have failed after brief, cosmetic success. Jamal Abdel Naser's Arab nationalism, after deluding the Arab world, proved its failure. The Syrian and Iraqi Ba'athi regimes are operative due only to the extreme repressive measures they resort to. Communism's farce has been discredited in the former Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, Latin and Central America, and Africa. Socialism is fading into the background of history. Yet Islam has unified ethnic and culturally diverse peoples across continents. It leaves no room for "Arab Islam", "Pakistani Islam", "Iranian Islam", or "Turkish Islam"; there is only Islam. Thus, within Islamic universalism there is unity but no uniformity.

Muslims in general, particularly many leaders of the current resurgence, are as self-critical as they are ethnically diverse. This willingness to re-examine symbols that have been imbedded in religious tradition aims to reconstruct certain conceptions of Islam — spiritually, socially, politically and economically. Thus the spirit of the Islamic resurgence can conceivably be defined in terms of a return to the roots of Islamic idiom.

This return to the "source" is seen by Muslims as a liberating force, yet defined by secular elites and the West as "fundamentalism". Yet reviving the fundamentals, the essential premise upon which Islamic life is based, is not akin to a "fundamentalism" that mires itself in retrogressive, historical wishful thinking. Rather, it brings a freshness of approach, a new commitment, dynamism, flexibility and ability to face challenges. Many people are rediscovering Islam as a source of civilization and culture, and as necessary factor in shaping society.

The current phase of Islamic resurgence involves a move away from a slavish imitation of Western models, adopting a selective outlook on what should and should not be adopted from external civilizations. Islamic society can benefit from the Western experience in a number of ways; but it has no intention of perpetuating the imposition of alien cultures at the expense of its own.

Observers often pose the question: can Muslim countries afford to reject certain choices vis-a-vis development, technology and so on? Simply put, they do not aim at rejection. But the real issue is what type of development is on offer and what objectives do they pursue? Muslims fear that the development being proffered to their nations are modern interpretations of Europe's white man's burden — a "civilizing" force that will infringe upon economic, social, moral and ideological development. Furthermore, "Muslims wonder about the future of ties between Islamic states. Will Muslim countries, geographically defined by colonialism, be deconstructed and redrawn or will they continue as nation-states?"

Realistically, there is no reverting in history. Muslims must progress more creatively than their predecessors. The nation-state is acceptable as a starting point; yet it is not an Islamic ideal. It is a geo-political reality which, if arbitrarily dismantled, will create a political vacuum inevitably filled with chaos. Therefore, a sense of unity must be fostered within the Islamic ummah, or community of people; and greater cooperation and integration between Muslim states must be encouraged. Islamic idealism dictates that each nation-state will eventually transform into an ideological state, thus creating the framework of a commonwealth of Islamic regions. Either this concept is sensed by the West and consequently, mistakenly, feared or, more short-sightedly, the West deems the current phase in the Islamization of Muslim states as a dangerous prelude to chaos that must be stopped.

The West, in general, has failed to recognize the strength and potential of the Islamic resurgence. It has labeled members of Islamic movements fundamentalist, radical, extremist, fanatic, anti-Western, anachronistic and so on. Obviously, such limited, disparaging definitions will not promote mutual understanding. The West is committing mistakes similar to those of its colonial predecessors, i.e. it is defining political spectrum based on its own self-reference framework, disregarding the socio-political diversity of other civilizations.

This selective approach does a great injustice not only to Muslims, but to humanity in general. It promotes disinformation among Western scholars, policy-makers and civilians alike. The Islamic resurgence is going through a period in its history that its proponents recognize as tumultuous; yet these discrepancies do not define the Islamic revival or the phoenix that will arise out of the current flames of corruption and debauchery in much of the Islamic world.

Muslims understand their current predicament as more than their socio-political and economic ills. Their perception goes deeper than material deficiencies in their lives and tackles the underlying problems they face — moral decay and warped values. Some express this cognizance profoundly,

others in less palpable ways. Nevertheless, these elements are sadly deficient from Western analyses of the Islamic revival. The spiritual dimension is often excluded, when in fact it is the core, as far as Muslims are concerned, of the problem. Instead, the Islamic resurgence is simplistically attributed completely to the people's frustration with a lack of progress, and who thus hope for economic and technological development in the guise of Islam. Such one-dimensional analyses show an ignorance of Muslim society's ethos.

Similarly erroneous is the reduction of the Islamic resurgence into merely the angry reaction of under-privileged Muslims against Western affluence. While reaction to the legacy of imperialism certainly plays a part, more than political fury is being expressed. A far more prominent cause of turmoil is the dissatisfaction with western ideals and values imported by elite cliques and imposed on the masses. The elites that run the institutions and systems of government force alien laws and regulations upon the people. Furthermore, Muslims are disaffected with their governments which they see as promoting Western interests (by imposing Western secular values and models of development) and ignoring their own.

The Islamic resurgence, therefore, is a critique of both the status quo in Muslim societies and the secular Westernization of these communities. This critical analysis stems "from a point of reference not seen in contemporary history. While many Arab and Muslim governments have invoked Islamic symbols for legitimacy, few have sought whole-hearted implementation of Islamic policy. The Islamic movements of today express a depth of sincerity and conviction in the Qur'an and the Prophet Muhammad's Sunnah, or teachings, not previously evinced by most political establishments in the region. What some observers have tried to blemish as the "awakening Islamic monster", is in fact the reawakening of the Islamic faith and destiny. Muslim spirituality and idealism has generated a new sense of direction and an unwavering commitment to reconstruct their world, regardless of personal sacrifice.

The colonial paradigm of leadership was one constructed strictly on self-interest. This legacy infected the Muslim world, making society virtually, devoid of moral values and rife with corruption. Exploitation has become the norm in this region. Muslims have their own weaknesses which caused the decline of their civilization. Yet the degree of corruption rampant in their midst today is a new phenomenon. Muslims associate this degradation with the impact of secular Westernization.

Some Muslim interpretations of modernism spearheaded the drive to secularize Muslim society, attempting to superimpose Western liberalism on Islamic conservative sensibilities — an explosive combination in and of itself. Thus, morality was compromised and subverted, leaving a vacuum. Personal aggrandizement and socioeconomic exploitation have taken advantage of this vacuity in the name of economic development and material progress.

The Islamic resurgence is a rebellion against such destructive trends. Ideally, it seeks reaffirmation of Islamic morality and a redirection of the Ummah's resources — material and human towards social justice and self-reliance.

Conclusion

The Islamic resurgence is a positive, ideological movement that is confined to the Muslim world, i.e. it has not expansionist tendencies. It is bound to cross paths with members of the international community, and have disagreements with some of them. While the colonial legacy is relevant to popular unrest in the region, it is not the most decisive factor in provoking Islamic reaction.

Muslims want to reconstruct their socio-economic order according to the values of Islam. This goal will inevitably come into conflict with the international status quo. However, Muslim criticism of Western civilization is not an exercise in political confrontation and should not be defined as such. The relationship is one of the competitiveness between two civilizations: one based on Islamic values, the other founded on materialism, nationalism and liberalism. It creates a choice between the Divine Principle and the Secular Materialist Culture. Choice is the emphasis here. Secularism, whether it is associated with capitalism or socialism, does not possess a monopoly over appropriate ideology. The presence of the Islamic resurgence gives many an avenue to escape from the worldly shackles of materialism.

Clearly, there is a political dimension to the situation that we must not ignore. There is nothing pathologically anti-Western in the Muslim resurgence. Regarding future political relations between Western countries and the Muslim world, members of the Islamic resurgence has been indifferent. Notwithstanding colonialism's loathsome legacy which could potentially mar these relations, the Islamists' primary concerns are directed internally. Yet a question looms: if China and the United States can have friendly relations without sharing a common culture or politico-economic system, what prevents the West from seeking similar ties with the Islamic movement that are poised to replace corrupt systems throughout the Muslim world? The response depends on how the West looks at the phenomenon of Islamic resurgence and whether or not it wants to 'come to terms with the reality of Islamic society and state.

Tensions will definitely increase if the West do nothing to allay Muslim fears that the Western model is being imposed upon them, in what they perceive to be a modern extension of imperial hegemony. Thus, both the Islamic movements and Western policymakers must make an effort to acknowledge the plurality of the contemporary geopolitical spectrum. Are we prepared to accept co-operation and co-existence, even pro-existence? Many in the Muslim world seek such a relationship, based on mutual respect and equal footing. Much, however, depends on how the west responds to this challenge. Thus, while the Islamic movements struggle to overcome the barriers erected by tyrannies, they also await positive signs from the west.
