ISLAMIC WORLD AND THE TRILATERAL COUNTRIES IN THE ERA OF GLOBALIZATION

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On September 11th, 2001, we witnessed a vicious attack on human civilisation, a crime that humankind deplored. In response, Europe, America and many others, enacted anti-terrorism legislation. Muslim men and women in these countries consider that they are viewed with apprehension and at times, serious suspicion. Prior to 11th September, I referred, on many occasions, to 'Islamophobia’. The fear of Islam, as many of us can remember, preceded that vicious attack on civilisation.

It has been said that: "Terrorists become any foreign people you don’t like". Are we today witnessing a confirmation of this vision?

Today, 75% of the Muslim population is under the age of 25 years. In the Islamic world today, petro-politics, authoritarian rule, corruption and poor governance make it virtually unlikely that Islamic values, which are universal in nature, can effectively make more contributions to human civilisation.

It is widely accepted that, like much of the developing world, Muslim societies have been stifled by their own systems of government. This needs to be remembered if we are to comprehend the differential impact of globalisation, not an ideology to be accepted or rejected, but a sweeping visionary process managed with seriousness and pragmatism. As this process covers more and more ground, the Islamic world appears to be slipping into a mindset that favours a Jihadist approach in facing major challenges, but overlooks the true meaning of Jihad. The Greater Jihad in Islam is the struggle of the self. It is explicit in Islam that those who are indifferent to oppression are oppressors themselves. It is the awareness of right from wrong, good from evil, which separates the true mujahid from the one who loudly, though falsely, claims to be actively engaged in a Jihad.

Islam is unfortunately seen by many as naturally antithetical to the development of democratic institutions, which is a false and dangerously misleading assumption. Yet, it is historically proven that tolerance, for example, is a fundamental principle and a basic value of Islam. The fundamental value of non-coercion (la ikrah fi al-din) is written in the Qur’an in the Islamic context. So when we talk about any original contribution of the Islamic world to the triatorial countries and to globalisation, we must start by avoiding reductionism (which reduces Islam and Muslims to caricature - indeed the debate is stifled because both the Muslim world and the West, indulge in mutual and excessive demonisation of the perceived other) and appreciate the contribution of Islamic civilisation to who and where we are today.

Our common ground is presently threatened by extremists on all sides who will, if given the chance, fill it with ideologies of hatred and terror in the pursuit of each other’s annihilation. This type of Jihadism hijacks not only airplanes but religion, turning human values against humanity itself.

My dream is to create a dynamically moderate platform, not only to speak out against ideologies that threaten us all, whatever their origin, but to work for human understanding.

The Holy Qur’an states: "Verily, Allah will not change the (good) condition of a people as long as they do not change their state (of goodness) themselves". [Surah Ar-Ra’da’ (13:11)]
It has been said, and I concur, that we need: "to turn our attention from the threat projected by radicals to the promise implied by liberals"***.

The West and Islam have been described as partners not only in business but in culture and civilisation and to quote prominent Islamic Ulama: "The West is more than technological production and military might. It is the spirit of the modern age rooted in a long and deep history of cultural and civilisational development of humanity, the Muslim contribution to which is not to be underestimated, but usually is"***. Europe is neither Dar al-Islam (House of Islam) nor Dar al-Harb (House of War). It is, for Muslims, Dar al-Sulh, the House of Reconciliation. It is possible to live there in accordance with Islam in the context of a social contract. Such is the dictate of reason if not the law of nature. Islam is Sirat al-Mustaqim, or the true path, so it is imperative upon us to find that true path, which is a path of peace and reconciliation. This opens the way for a sincere dialogue (hiwar) in the most holistic and all-inclusive sense.

"Invite (all) to the Way of your Lord with wisdom and good preaching; and argue with them in ways that are the best." Holy Qur’an [Sūrah Al-Nahl (16:125)].

**Ethics / Code Of Conduct**

An ethic of human solidarity is required all the more urgently after September 11th wherein the promotion of multilateralism becomes an urgent imperative.

Al-Amr bil ma’arouf wa ‘nnahi ‘an al-munkar (enjoining right and forbidding wrong) might be regarded as an international ethical foundation which places international law and obligations to uphold agreed upon international standards of behaviour towards one another (whether as countries, individuals or communities) in the context of a moral imperative. But if this is to have any meaning, it has to be given more emphasis than a merely parochial statement - it has to have universalism as its inspiration and understanding as its aspiration.

To rigidly enforce ideas that deny the humanitarian precepts of tolerance, pluralism, justice and self-determination is antithetical to Islam, to our human compulsion and to our need to know one another.

What is truly destabilising and disintegrative is not the revival of genuine religious faith, but a total collapse of religion-based norms and ethics.

Our choice is, therefore, simple and stark. We can move further away from each other in mutual distrust and an attitude of 'every man for himself'. Or, we can move closer together in mutual understanding and appreciation, in order to create greater security and greater opportunity for all.

Globalisation is not an out of control engine and does not operate independently of either the nation state or non-state actors; rather, it requires an integrated network of support to exist. It needs a rule of law and stability at all levels and in all spheres to function. I echo Brazilian President, Enrique Cardoso, when he says that it is a serious mistake to think of globalisation as the result of market forces alone.

We need therefore to draw up a blueprint for a new way of thinking. One of the first steps is to establish a global 'culture of compliance’ with regard to international humanitarian and human rights law****. Expressing the principle of equality, for example, means less than nothing if it does not mean introducing legislation and education that are consistently and continuously put into practice in order that equality may exist in real terms. In that context, we have to recognise that we are truly stakeholders in our mutual destiny. Stakeholding means we should all enjoy
pluralism and freedom of communication - not only *between* cultures and traditions but also, just as importantly, *within* them.

But the rules to global governance must be based upon an ethical understanding of shared values and common principles that are identified as universal in their origination and their practical application.

Moses Mendelssohn, the German Jewish philosopher, developed a philosophy of inter-faith tolerance based on the existence of a common denominator of all religions. He considered that they all share a universal religion of reason, each with its own traditional version of the revelation - be it through the books of Moses, the Gospel or the Qur'an.*****

It has been argued that the most serious challenge to unilateralism is the promotion of ethics and ethical standards of behaviour, because ultimately unilateral action has to be morally justified to have any meaning or acceptance other than by coercive force******.

Aristotle advised that everything about humans, at a fundamental level, is a question of ethics. If globalisation is about improvements and a better world, global governance means nothing without ethics and a code of conduct. The age of sanity and wisdom must come about, inviting a common understanding of a need to return to international humanitarian, legal and moral norms.

Poverty

The UNDP cites in its 1999 report that the consequences of economic globalisation as the reason for leaving people homeless, landless and hungry, while removing access to even the most basic public services such as health and medical care, education, sanitation, fresh water, public transport, job training and the like.

According to an IMF press release in 2000, "...too many countries, and nearly one-fifth of the world population, have regressed in relative and sometimes even absolute terms. This is arguably one of the greatest economic failures of the 20th Century. One-fifth of the world’s people live in high-income countries which possess 86% of the world’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP), whereas the poorest fifth receive only 1%; half of the world’s population live on less than $2 a day; two thirds of illiterate adults are women; over $1.5 trillion is exchanged every day in currency markets around the world, and 95% of this total represents speculative transactions that fail to benefit the world’s poorest countries.

The combined sales of the world’s top 200 companies surpass the combined economies of 182 countries. More than a billion people in developing countries lack access to safe water, and more than 2.4 billion people lack adequate sanitation. Moreover, 800 million people in the developing countries lack "food security".

When we talk about security we should address global food security. In 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights proclaimed that access to food is a human right. For over ten years, we have called for the establishment of an international Zakat (Alms) fund. I even spoke of matching funds with funds from the international money pool. I speak of the importance of humanitarian outreach - perhaps the idea of an international non-denominational peace corps comprised of medical and social workers, as a mechanism to alleviate want, and I feel strongly about soliciting support for this proposal*******.

The Independent Commission on International Humanitarian Issues (ICIHI) of which I had the privilege of co-chairing with Sadruddin Aga Khan, presented their Report to the General Assembly in 1987. The ICIHI was represented by 26 countries and addressed the ethic of human
solidarity in relation to Armed Violence, Vulnerable Groups, The Uprooted, Man-Made Disasters and New Man-Made Disasters. We called for a New International Humanitarian Order which would incorporate key elements of the above.

A human being in a weak, conflict-ridden region like Africa wants the stability and cultural security that will allow him or her to work towards achievement and success for self, family and friends. The human being in an affluent and strong community, on the other hand, wants the same stability and cultural security for the same reasons. The human being in the interim Afghan government regime is no different. With such fundamental and universal needs in common, we are actually in a position to build a global culture that has, at its heart, the idea of supporting and promoting basic human rights.

Yet poverty remains a breeding ground for extremism, civil wars and ethnic and religious tension. In a globalised world, poverty reduction means conflict reduction, combat of disease and environmental improvement.

The United Nations Charter recognises the linkages between maintaining international peace and security, the establishment of conditions of economic and social progress and development, and the promotion and protection of universal human rights. The Charter contains a legal obligation on States to promote, *inter alia*, higher standards of living, full employment and conditions of economic and social progress and development, and universal respect for, and observance of, human rights. To do otherwise is a violation of principles of *jus cogens*.

**Globalisation**

Globalisation as a phenomenon based on the success of transnational corporations and a new economic order, has been much discussed. But what has not been explored is the globalisation of values. It is feared that the disappearance of national borders and the emergence of a new world interconnected by markets will deal a severe blow to regional and national cultures and to the traditions and customs that determine cultural identity. But culture can be used positively to enhance globalisation. The differences as well as the commonalities matter, and can be constructively used if we understand globalisation as being about promoting the common good.

When it comes to globalisation and Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), it is worth noting that about 80% of these investments occur among the high income countries. Out of the world total FDI of 914 billion dollars in 1999, about 727 billion dollars went to the advanced countries. World leaders in Monterrey have recently been trying to live up to the pledges made at the turn of the new millennium: to halve global poverty by 2015, reduce mortality rates among the under five year olds by two thirds, secure universal primary education - just to name some of the targets. Financial and technical aid is necessary but not sufficient. Investment and trade are key factors. It has been estimated that textile tariffs and agricultural subsidies among the rich nations cost the developing countries about 376 billion dollars a year. Fairer terms of trade, not just aid, should be considered.

Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammad said recently, and rightfully so, that Muslim countries should act in concert in the shaping of globalisation so that it can benefit them and the rest of the world. He said Muslims should not reject globalisation outright, but could influence its interpretation, regulate it, change its base and reshape it********.

**United States of America**

Joseph Nye said that: "The U.S. is going to have to learn to cooperate better with other countries". There is, some have argued, a trend in the U.S. towards isolationism, which is reflected in the
unilateralist approach of the country’s general foreign policy direction. It has also been argued that: "Globalisation and surrounding issues, have serious implications for U.S. foreign policy", and that it is therefore "in the interests of the U.S. to encourage the development of a world in which the fault lines separating nations are bridged by shared interests". The Western hemisphere is not a monolith, so Islam is not a monolith. Surely what we seek is not only dialogue between our cultures, but dialogue within our cultures.

U.S. society is made up of many national factions. The Qur'anic verse: "We have made you nations and tribes that you may know one another" is nowhere more singularly apt than in the U.S.A. Thus it is incumbent on the U.S. to do some soul-searching and to base its international commitments on fair play, justice, understanding and objectivity. America’s spiritual heart must not beat out of sync with the rest of humanity. America, the home of the brave, should be leading the beat. This is a world with concessions from the law of war, inter alia, governing the treatment of refugees and of victims of terror; but we need to evolve a law of peace that should help us transform from a culture of survival and exclusion to a culture of participation and peace.

The World Conference on Religion and Peace project on religious cooperation for peace in the Middle East includes renouncing religious justifications for terrorism and advocating shared principles. It also talks of getting out of polarised and hostile mindsets.

For Muslim communities, particularly in the West, the impact of September 11th has been significant and the subsequent climate in which they have been living, has in many ways, mirrored that of society at large - increased fear, insecurity and suspicion. Added to this, however, Muslims have had to deal, in many instances, with a heightened sense of polarisation and discrimination as minorities.

Conclusion

When Einstein was asked why he was interested in the future, he answered, "I intend to spend the rest of my life there".

Universalism does not mean hegemony. True universalism means acceptance of differences. Diversity is a fundamental pillar of Islam. Islam defends the right to differ (haq al-ikhtilaf).

Graham Fuller correctly states that Islam has become a vehicle and vocabulary for the expression of many different agendas in the Muslim world. He asks: "Will Muslims recoil from the violence and sweeping anti-Westernism unleashed in their name, or will they allow Osama bin Laden and his cohort to shape the character of future relations between Muslims and the West?"

Too many Islamic countries live under political systems where power is monopolised and where freedom of opinion and of speech are restricted or nonexistent; where repression, denial of basic rights and violation of human dignity are the daily lot of the citizen, there is, understandably, no hope to create a favourable environment for the development of human resources and knowledge and for the advancement of society as a whole. The right to speak, to express one’s difference, to innovate, to create and to publish one’s findings, will remain but an illusion so long as we have not ensured respect for human rights and for the rule of law. The essential role of women is not fully recognised. In hampering the advancement of women we are preventing the emancipation of half our society.

It has even come to pass that putative Hadiths are fabricated and spread by tyrants to suit their own purposes and to hold back the Muslim community.
The world *problematique* - the most serious crisis we are faced with is primarily an ethical one. There is a crisis because there is no global vision and no broad social project commensurate with the challenges facing contemporary society.

Our global civilisation is a world heritage. When a professor of mathematics in the U.S.A. invokes an algorithm to solve a difficult computational problem, they may not know that they are invoking the Muslim pioneer of mathematics, Muhammad ibn Musa al-Khwarazmi (9th Century). Indeed, the very term *algebra* is derived from the title of al-Khwarazmi’s seminal investigation, *al-Jabr wa al-Muqabalah*.

As a Muslim I believe that God does not order people to do evil things. I believe that good is inherent in each one of us. The central ethical command in Islam is to rule according to justice and fairness, not only in principle, but also in the actions of each day. In our hearts, we know that neither 'religion’, nor ‘ambition’, nor ‘money’ is the root of all human ills. They are powerful forces for good or for evil according to the nature of our actions and intentions. The perversions of such forces - extremist belief, the craze for power, abject poverty begging from glutton wealth - these are the enemies that drive out peace. But religion for humanity - ambition for humanity - money for humanity - these are the redemptive agents of peace.

We need to elevate the consciousness of who we are and of our diverse relationships with each other and the universe. The Qur'an repeatedly calls us to observe "the perpetual change of winds", "the alternation of day and night", the "variety of human colours and tongues", "the alternation of days of success and reverse among peoples" - to reflect on our part in a completeness of creation that is beautiful for its diversity.

Back in the early 1980s, President Ronald Reagan paid tribute to: "the great civilised ideas, individual liberty, representative government and the rule of law under God" that the British Parliament represented. There are more than echoes of this, of course, in the U.S. Constitution, but it may not surprise you altogether that these are also the echoes of Islam and of Islamic civilisation. Again and again we see echoes of Islam and the same values in speeches by leaders as far afield as Vaclav Havel, Tony Blair, Pervez Musharraf and George W. Bush.

Churchill said that there is no limit to the power that we can generate together. I should like to hope that there is no limit to the good we can generate and pass on as an energy to the future generations. That is the sort of leadership this world is crying out for.

Let us work to adopt and promote a mindset which views the eradication of poverty, racism, terrorism, inequality, hatred and intolerance as an inescapable moral imperative for each one of us. This means not just a monologue but an interactive conversation and meaningful dialogue; it requires altruism rather than patronage, participation as opposed to survival, and contribution instead of passivity. We have to give future generations some constructive hope that it is possible to build not merely a new world order but a new world attitude.

Let us together herald the age of sanity and wisdom, altruism and caring - even just tolerance is no longer acceptable. His Majesty the late King Hussein said: "Human beings are our most valuable possessions". This is not a mere slogan, but rather a working methodology that almost rises to the level of faith. Yet, in the recent words of His Holiness Pope John Paul II: "It seems that war has been declared on peace in the Middle East".

** By kind permission of Professor Shimon Shamir in his lecture to the Oxford Centre for
Hebrew and Jewish Studies, (Oxford, 14th February, 2002).
**** Project Proposal relating to Problems of Implementation and Compliance in the field of International Humanitarian and Human Rights Law - June, 2000 - The United Nations Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and The Independent Bureau for Humanitarian Issues (IBHI).
***** Moses Mendelssohn (1729-1786) - From lecture at Oxford Centre for Jewish and Hebrew Studies, Oxford, 14/02/02, Professor Shimon Shamir - not for publication and by special permission.
****** In U.S. Unilateralism, Progressive Internationalism, and Alternatives to Neoliberalism (Nov 2000), Ian Robinson.
******** Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohammad.
********* Professor David Rothkop, writing in Foreign Policy, June 22nd, 1997.
********** The Holy Qur’an ١٤٩٣ (49:13).
*********** In The Future of Political Islam, (Foreign Affairs, March-April 2002), Graham Fuller