

## Muslim Response to Modernity and a new strategy of peace in the world

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### Abstract

Muslim countries gained political independence from mid 40s onwards. However, during the colonial rule, Western powers tried to replace the Muslim thought, culture and institutions with the Western thought and culture through all possible means. Muslim reaction to Western thought and civilization after liberation ranged from complete acceptance to resistance and total indifference. The dominating approach was of reconciliation which resulted in Westernization of the Muslim societies by the second half of 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, it seems necessary to review the Muslims strategy at this stage. This article is a review and proposes a new approach in this direction.

**Key Words:** Modernity, Islam, Response, Acceptance, Resistance, Reconciliation, Indifference, media, education

### 1. Introduction

The political downfall of the Muslim Ummah after providing leadership to the world in every sphere for a millennium, was primarily due to two main factors Muzaffar,iqbal(2003), First, weakening of its commitment to its world view and non-compliance of Islamic injunctions, and secondly, the colonial policies of the Western nations which not only contributed to the downfall of Muslim Ummah but also occupied Muslim lands. The colonial powers destroyed Muslim institutions and values by force and thrust the Western thought, culture and institutions upon them in order to keep the Muslims under their thumb.

Referring to the imperial powers' attitude, John L Esposito writes:

“Europe came not only with its armies of bureaucrats and soldiers but also with its Christian missionaries. The double threat of colonialism was that of the crown and the cross. The mutual relationship between the clergy and the government and military was proclaimed by France’s Marshal Bugeaud, who praised their ‘grand rapports’, commenting that the clergy “gain for us the hearts of the Arabs whom we have subjected to force of arms.” The preachers and missionary institutions (churches, schools, hospitals, and building houses) were regarded by many Muslims as an arm of imperialism, one aspect of a policy that displaced indigenous institutions, supplanted local languages and history with Western curricula, and seduced souls through schools and social welfare.”John. L, Esposito (1992),

However, within a century or two, the Muslims were able to rid themselves of the colonial rule of the West in the true Islamic spirit (Quran), that cant tolerate alien subjugation. Their commitment to Islamic worldview was no doubt weakened but had not died out.

Historically, the religious leadership played a leading role not only in the freedom movements of Muslim lands but also in framing Muslim response to modernity in the newly independent Muslim states. According to some orientalists, the Muslim reaction to modernity in the Sub-Continent varied from "blind and self defeating hostility" to "reasonable cooperation" John.L,Esposito(1992), However, in the broader sense, this response can be divided into four categories: 1) complete acceptance, 2) reconciliation, 3) strong resistance and 4) total indifference.

We would discuss these strategies one by one and our views are largely based on the behavior of the Muslims in the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent but the same is true generally for most of the Muslim countries.

## **2. Total Acceptance**

Some Muslim rulers after the First World War specially Mustafa Kamal Ataturk in Turkey and Raza Shah Pehlvi in Iran blindly accepted the Western thought and worldview and tried to enforce the Western culture through the state power. The religious leadership and the public at large in these countries, however, rejected this Westernization and subsequent uprising in favor of Islam and pro-Islamic governments in Turkey and Iran perhaps is the reaction of this Westernization in the past. John.L,Esposito(1992),

## **3. Policy of Reconciliation**

The Western colonial powers had demolished the social system of Muslim lands and managed to transfer power to the social groups brought up in the Western-style. Accordingly, most of Muslim rulers in the new born Muslim states readily accepted Western life style and institutions. However, the religious leadership in most of the Muslim countries had also organized itself by this time and many Islamic groups resisted the government policies. They were, however, unsuccessful mainly because of the brutal use of state power by the governments (mostly run by military and civil dictators or monarchs) to silence the Islamic organizations with the political support of the West. This state of affairs gradually led to a situation where several Islamic groups accepted Western political institutions with a blend of certain basic Islamic concepts. The existing political structure of Muslim countries is, perhaps, the best example of this reconciliation.

In Pakistan for example, the rulers from Muslim League were in favour of Western democracy. And the religious parties despite their belief that Western democracy was un Islamic, Charles J, Adams (1983), did not find any other wayout except to accept Western democracy after certain basic Islamic principles, such as Sovereignty for Allah and legislation to be in line with the Islamic injunctions etc,Dr. Safdar, Mehmood(1975), were incorporated and the adoption of the 'Objectives Resolution' by the Constituent Assembly. They agreed to take part in elections with the intention to mould the state structure according to Islamic teachings through popular vote. Mawdudi,

Now, that half a century has passed, it seems appropriate to study the net result of this experiment. Apparently, the politicians who had opted politics as 'profession' or 'career' for personal ambitions, have been able to adjust themselves in the existing political set up but the religious groups and religio-political parties who had a declared agenda of Islamization of state and society, have failed. No doubt they made mistakes but it is also a fact that the Western nations engineered their failure with the help of local governments. The state power was used to ensure that religious parties did not win the elections. Pakistan, Indonesia, Malaysia, Nigeria, Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Libya and Tunisia are perhaps the best examples of this Western strategy. Karen, Armstrong, On the other hand, in the countries where Islamic groups managed to come to power despite all obstacles, such as Iran and Turkey, enormous pressure was being built to make them a failure.

### *3.1 Results of Reconciliation Policy*

Many religious parties or groups such as Ikhwan-ul-Muslimoon (*Muslim Brotherhood*) in the Middle East, *Jamat-i-Islami* in Pakistan and other Islamic movements besides some of the Ulema, still support the reconciliation policy in spite of their failure in politics. An analysis would show that notwithstanding their significant role in promoting the Islamic cause in the Muslim communities, their Reconciliatory approach in politics has been instrumental in secularization of the Muslim political thought on the whole. Islamic political concepts introduced by the Islamist groups in Western polity have almost been merged into the Western liberal democracy and thus lost their identity. The defeat of the Islamic groups on the political front has also led to the domination of the Western thought and behavior in other spheres of life such as economics, education, law, culture and social life. Consequently, the Muslim societies are becoming westernized speedily and the religio-political parties/movements are unable to check this trend ; what to speak of Islamization of society and state. Karen, Armstrong,

### *3.2 Schools of Reconciliation*

It is somewhat natural in the case of large organizations and movements to have many shades of opinion under the central theme, some of which are at the center while others move on in the right or the left of the centre. Similarly, among the followers of the Reconciliation policy, some are close to 'Resistance' strategy whereas some are on the borders of 'Acceptance'. The latter group having been fascinated by Western thought and culture, tends to reinterpret Islam making it compatible with the Western thought. Scholars of this type are found in almost all Muslim societies although these are small in number and not popular among masses. Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, Amir Ali, Charagh Ali, Mazheruddin, Siddiqui (1993), and in the recent past, Ghulam Ahmad Parvez, Dr. Fazlur Rahman, Ghulam Jilani Barq and in today's Pakistan, Javaid Ahmad Ghamdi and Dr. Javaid Iqbal fall in this group.

## **4. Policy of 'Resistance'**

Some religious groups of the Muslim society on the other hand, rejected the reconciliatory approach. Their argument was that the Western thought and the world view upon which it is based, not only differ from Islam but are contradictory to it, therefore all Western institutions deserve to be rejected. They want to create awareness among the Muslim masses and elite to resist Western thought so that new institutions in the Muslim societies develop purely in the

light of Quran and Sunnah. This viewpoint appeared academically sound and close to Islamic tenets but practically the followers of this philosophy emerged as extremists and clashed not only with Westernized Muslim rulers but also with Muslim organizations in areas where they were able to muster support— even at the cost of their own existence. *Al Takfir wa all Hijra*, Sohail, mehmood(1995), of Egypt, *Hizb al-Tehrir*, Suha Taji, Farouki(2003), and Pakistani Taliban, Musa Khan, Jalal Zai 1999), can perhaps be taken as representatives of this viewpoint. And Al-Qaeda can also be listed among these because it decided to clash with the US which currently leads the Western thought and civilization. It accepted the responsibility of 9/11 attacks and tried to justify these as a reaction to US/Western oppression and brutalities in Muslim lands; in Palestine, Bosnia, Kashmir, Chechnya ... etc. Rohan, Gunaratna (2002),

This Resistance policy of some Muslim groups has irritated the West particularly the US where a fundamentalist Neo-Cons Republican Party has been in power for two terms and has framed a strong anti Islamic agenda with religious zeal. Opponents of the US maintain that the US, as the colonial power of 21<sup>st</sup> century, Rohan, Gunaratna (2002), has started a war against Islam and the Muslims under the cover of “war on terror” and crushed Afghanistan and Iraq. Although Europe does not endorse US hegemony and resists US claim as the sole super power of the world, yet it fully supports US designs against Islam and the Muslims.

#### *4.1 Outcome of Resistance Policy*

The Resistance policy, in our view, has somewhat weakened the present Muslim society because the Resistance groups are not strong enough to defeat the US and the West, and are compelled to fight a guerilla war or make suicide attacks. However, they claim they would be able to weaken and defeat the US in the long run. And although the Muslim masses do not support the resistance groups in principle during peace times, yet they approve their activities against the forces occupying Muslim lands such as Afghanistan, Iraq, Palestine, Kashmir, Chechnya considering it a holy war or Jihad.

Even if we don't debate the rationale of the Resistance strategy from the view point of Islamic law, a question arises whether the Muslims are going to gain anything out of the decline of the US. In the near past, the Muslims (of Afghanistan and Pakistan with active support of the Middle Eastern Arab countries besides the US and Europe), have defeated the USSR. However, did the Muslim world gain anything out of that? With the downfall of the Soviet Union, the USA emerged as the sole super power of the world. Next, the USA abandoned Afghanistan and Pakistan to their fate. The Afghan were driven into a civil war, cutting each other's throat while Pakistan was pushed into political instability, deteriorating law & order and recent US air attacks on its northern border.

The question is, if at all, the Muslims are able to defeat or weaken the USA; it would be the European Union or China that would emerge stronger and not the Muslims. There is no systematic, planned and organized effort of Muslims advancement in research, education, trade & industry, science & technology, political & economic stability...etc. On the other hand, the Resistance policy is weakening Muslim society as the Resistant Groups are not only fighting against the US and its allies but also against the ‘impious’ Muslim rulers supporting the West, willingly or otherwise. This internal war has led to chaos and anarchy in the Muslim society and created distances between the rulers and the people, resulting in political

instability and economic decline besides deterioration of law & order. Therefore, it is not sure that the struggle or Jihad of Muslim Resistance Groups would end up in the downfall of the West and rise of Muslim Ummah.

### **5. Attitude of Complete Indifference**

Next is a group of Muslims which is totally indifferet to the threat from the Western thought and civilization. This group is active in preaching of Islam and endeavours to bring the believers closer to Islamic beliefs. However, it confines itself to rituals, morals and individual behavior and has no agenda for political and socio-economic reforms. The *Jam'at al-Tabligh* falls in this group. *The Tableeghi Jamaat* is perhaps the largest religious movement all over the world and holds huge gatherings in different countries from time to time. It is a worldwide movement and its members keep on moving from place to place and from country to country throughout the year inviting their Muslim Brethren to practice fundamentals of Islam. They have instructions from their leaders to avoid discussion on politics, socio-economic conditions of the Muslim countries as also the designs of the West towards Islam and Muslims. Yogindar, Skiand(2002),

The members of this Movement, in spite of their commitment and sincerity, have a very narrow concept of Islam, confining it only to rituals and morals and deliberately ignoring the Islamic injunctions concerning political and social and economic aspects of life. They are indifferent to the onslaught of the Western ideology and culture on the Muslim society, an attitude that can hardly be justified. That is why many Muslim scholars and Ulema do not approve this approach and consider it harmful for the Muslim Ummah, Yogindar, Skiand(2002),

### **6. Need for a New Strategy**

So far, we have discussed Muslim response to modernity and arrived at the conclusion that the policies of Acceptance, Reconciliation, Resistance and Indifference followed by the Muslim political and religious leadership have limited scope; hence the need to evolve a new strategy. However, before proposing one, we deem it necessary to discuss in brief the attitude of West towards Islam and the Muslims.

### **7. West's Attitude towards Islam and Muslims**

The attitude of the West towards Islam has been based on bias and even hatred throughout as was manifest in the Crusades, Muhammad, Asad(1991), following the rise of the Islamic civilization. In addition to it the Orientalists also contributed greatly to distort the image of Islam. Islam was presented as decaying civilization, a backward and irrational religion through the works of orientalist and was popularized through Hollywood movies, Ibrahim, Kalin(2004), West has created the image of Muslims and Islam from the so called intellectual works of its paid writers and intellectuals. During the 19th century, the Western powers destabilized Muslim countries and occupied most of their lands. They tried to prolong their hold on the Muslim lands through every possible means, destroyed their state structure and institutions, replacing them with their own based on the Western world view. However, the Western imperialism was compelled to liberate Muslim lands due to the Muslims' freedom

movements and the wars amongst Western nations (World War I & II). While liberating the Muslim states in mid twentieth century; Western powers tried to transfer power to such factions of the Muslim society as had been educated and trained in Western style and were enchanted by the Western thought and life style. Even afterwards, the West continued its conspiracies to destabilize Muslim countries under the garb of economic assistance, quality education, and social reforms.etc.

In spite of all that, some Muslim countries (such as Iraq, Iran, Pakistan and Turkey) were able to hold ground and attempted to devise their own policies ignoring Western pressure. This was however not acceptable to the West. In the 1979 USSR invaded Afghanistan and the local Muslim population began a resistance movement. This gave the West an opportunity to defeat Communism and USSR with the help of Muslim world. The cold war came to an end and USA emerged as the sole Super Power of the world. The West tried to avail this opportunity for its dominance over the whole world and universalization of its thought and culture. At this point of time, Western thinkers like Bernard, Lewis (1990), and Samuel P, Huntington (1993), introduced the concept of 'Clash of Civilizations' indirectly implying that there was no room for an ideology or civilization that challenged the supremacy of Western thought and civilization. However, they noticed Islam as a great ideological force that taught its believers not to accept any other ideology or power. The Muslims were the foremost to stick to their ideology and reject the Western hegemony, something not acceptable to the West. Therefore, the 9/11 tragedy was engineered to provide the US an excuse to launch so-called 'war on terror' and attack the Muslim countries, Tariq, Majeed (2006) The US compelled the UN and the European countries to support her plans and they did it; and if some were reluctant, it did not care. It attacked the Muslim territory with its huge, most modern and destructive fighting power. Afghanistan and Iraq have been devastated, Pakistan is under fire and Iran is next in line.

It is in this scenario that we feel the Muslims need to devise a new strategy with reference to the West. The new strategy, in our humble opinion, should have the following characteristics:

### *7.1 Peaceful Strategy*

In the prevailing conditions, an armed conflict with the West and the US is not in the interest of the Muslim Ummah. The Muslims should realize that they are not strong enough to defeat the US and the West with their present resources nor can they get a period of peace that could ensure their rapid and smooth progress. The policy of confrontation would continue to irritate the Western powers and give them an excuse to ignite the flames of hatred in the hearts of Western public against Islam and Muslims. Therefore, the Muslims should adopt the policy of peace in general. However, any aggression by the West against a Muslim state should be resisted with full force and the entire Muslim world should support the victim in line with the UN charter and the universal law that guarantees religious freedom and the right of self-defense.

### *7.2. Greater emphasis on Education and Media*

All Muslim states, socio-religious movements and their NGOs should focus on education and media. Education plays primary role in character building and personality development. Muslim organizations and NGOs would get full public support in this task. In fact, thousands

of schools in private sector are already functioning in the country and there is need to do this job at grass root level through community mobilization. Curriculum and personality development in these schools should be strictly in the light of the Islamic injunctions and values although the Western experiments in the field of education should also be studied if these do not clash with the Islamic viewpoint and every possible good be derived from those.

Since education of science and technology involves heavy expenditure which can be borne only by the states, the private institutions should focus on social sciences and humanities. The establishment of model educational institutions in large numbers in the Muslim world in the private sector would definitely be helpful in bringing up young practicing Muslims which would ultimately strengthen Muslim institutions and society at large.

Print and electronic media are a great source of informal education and have important role in personality development and changing individuals' thought and behavior. However, the media in the Muslim countries can play its role in conformity with the Islamic injunctions and Muslims interests only if it is independent; independent in the sense that it is not enchanted by the Western thought and life style. Such independent Muslim media can initiate a useful dialogue between West and Islam can help in removing misconceptions and misgivings about Islam and Muslims usually stemming out of ignorance and lack of communication.

### *7.3 Focus on Individuals*

Most of Islamic organizations and religio-political parties of Muslim countries are engaged in efforts to change the society through state power through the political process and elections. It is now proposed that they shift their focus and concentrate on individual instead of the system. The society is composed of individuals; therefore if the thinking and attitudes of individuals is changed, a change would automatically occur in the society. No doubt it is a slow process but it can produce better results. Moreover, this policy is nearer to Islamic principle of reformation which suggests that 'change should begin from home'; implying that reformation should flow from down to upward, from individual to family, relatives and immediate surroundings (Streets, counties), from municipalities to Districts, Divisions, to provinces and federal government and not from up to downward. According to Quran this has been the policy of all the Apostles of Allah.(Quran)

### *7.4 Not Always at the Receiving End*

Not that the Muslims should only be at the receiving end. No doubt, they are much behind the West in science & technology, and military might but there are certain fields wherein the Muslims are stronger than the West. For example, the Muslim family system is intact to a great extent.(Quran) The Muslim society has inherited religious values, traditions and rituals. In spite of their poor living conditions, most of the Muslims lead peaceful lives. Over and above that, the original sources of Islam (Quran and *Sunnah*) are with them completely safe and unhampered, injunctions whereof are based on logic and reason, hence appealing to modern man who is spiritually sick, forlorn and bewildered in spite of rapid advancement in science and technology.

This means that Muslims are spiritually richer and ideologically stronger than the people in the West and they need not always to be at the receiving end. In other words, they are in a position to deliver their ideology and spiritual experiences to the West and the Muslim thinkers, intellectuals and writers need not be apologetic about Islam. This approach would not only give Muslims (especially to the younger generations) a feeling of strength and a direction to march ahead but a sense of pride in their heritage and values. And it is in this spirit, that they can carry the ever-living and ever-fresh message of Islam to the West, and by using modern means and technology, they can win the hearts and minds of the Western people who are in search of peace of mind and heart.

#### *7.5 Speedy Development*

The Muslim society also needs to avoid an armed conflict with the West and instead adopt effective steps for speedy development in a peaceful environment. 'Development' here means 'development in Islamic perspective' as had been achieved in the period of the early Muslim caliphs implying poverty alleviation, high literacy rate, political stability, economic independence, strong societal structure and above all moral development. The basis of all this should be commitment to the Islamic worldview through proper and effective use of education, training (*Tarbiya*) and media.

#### *7.6 Leadership*

A question may arise, where the leadership to implement this strategy is? In our view, the people committed to the Islamic worldview and well educated in modern disciplines, are better suited for this task than the traditional Ulema. Also, the younger generation should be educated, trained and motivated to work for this strategy for bringing about a real change in the Muslim society.

It is hoped that if the *Ummah* adopts this strategy, main features of which have been identified above, it would not only save the Muslim society from the storm of westernization but also provide it an alternate paradigm for rapid development and help her overcome its weaknesses.

### **8. Conclusion**

To conclude, it is our considered opinion that the strategies being followed by Muslims against the Western hegemony at present and to regain their lost glory are ineffective, and cannot produce the desired results; and it is high time for the Muslim thinkers and intellectuals to adopt a new approach. The suggestions above are a humble attempt in this direction and may invoke a meaningful discussion.

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*Bernard Lewis in his article presented the idea of clash of civilization. We are facing a mood and a movement far transcending the level of issues and policies and the governments that pursue them. This is no less than a clash of civilization--- the perhaps irrational but surely historic reaction of an ancient rival against our Judeo- Christian heritage, our secular present and the world-wide expansion of both.*

Charles J. Adams.( 1983), “Mawdudi and the Islamic State” in *Voices of Resurgent Islam*, ed. John L Esposito,103. New York, Oxford University Press,.

*(Mawdudi believed that Democracy is the kind of government in which the majority of rule whether its views be right or wrong, and in which a minority may hope to have a voice in affairs only by transforming itself into the majority. No guarantees of rights or other safeguards that might be built into a democratic constitution could truly protect a minority in democratic polity. Democracy, when reduced to its bare bones, amounts only to the tyranny of the majority.*

Dr Safdar Mehmood (1975), *The Constitutional Foundations of Pakistan*, (Publishers United Limited:), 16-21, 775.

These points were included in the Objective Resolution which now has become the part of the 1973 Constitution of Pakistan in vogue at present.

Ibrahim Kalin, “Roots of Misconception: Euro-American Perceptions of Islam Before and After September 11”,(ed.)

Joseph E.B Lumbard,( 2004), in *Islam, Fundamentalism and the Betrayal of Tradition*, (Bloomington: World Wisdom, Inc.), p. 163.

Writer has included numerous examples of the orientalist who through their work build up the negative image of Islam and Muslims and presently working on it.

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Karen Armstrong, *Islam: A Short History*, p.154-156

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Mawdudi declared that Pakistani state has pronounced Islam when Objective Resolution was passed by the constituent Assembly

Mazheruddin Siddiqui,( 1993), *Modern Reformist Thought in The Muslim World*, Delhi: Adam Publishers,) the book describes the ideas of Muslim modernists in particularly of Sub- Continent., Also see Aziz Ahmad, *Islamic Modernism in India and Pakistan1857-1964*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1967) ideas of Sir Sayyed Ahmad Khan and other modernists are being discussed in it.

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*It was crusades, first and foremost, that decided the European attitude towards Islam for many centuries to come. The crusades were decisive because they fell in the period of Europe's childhood, a period when its peculiar cultural traits were asserting themselves for the first time and were still in process of molding... Crusades produced one of the deepest and most permanent impressions on Europe's mass psychology. .. Modern Europe was born out of the crusades. The spirit of the crusades --- in a much diluted form, to be sure--- still lingers over Europe, and the attitude of its civilization towards the Muslim world bears distinct traces of that die-hard ghost.*

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Musa Khan Jalal Zai,( 1999), *Taliban and the Great Game in Afghanistan*, (Karachi: Vanguard Books Limited, ),110-113.

Quran:3:85, 9:29, As is know that concept of 'Religion' in Islam differs from that of the West; and in Muslim tradition 'Islam' is a creed, a world view and a complete code of life which precedes the society and the state.

Quran 74:4, 26:214, 6:92

Quran .13:28, According to Qur'an peaceful living depends upon 'Remembrance of Allah' which leads to practicing Islamic injunctions as ordered in Allah's divine guidance.

Quran 15:9 Allah guarantees that it would remain safe for ever.

Rohan Gunaratna,( 2002) *Inside Al Qaeda Global Network of Terror*,(Karachi: Vanguard Books Ltd.,)

Rohan Gunaratna,( 2002) p. 88

*Al Qaeda believes that until US troops are ejected from Saudi Arabia, Muslim society will be 'living a life of sin'. As one fighter put it, 'Until the US troops are removed from all lands of the Muslims; no Muslim is absolved from sin except the Mujahidin. To mobilize the Muslim masses, Osama is likely to make the same argument regarding US troops in Afghanistan and Pakistan.*

Samuel P. Huntington, (1993), "*The Clash of Civilization*", Foreign Affairs 3: 39,

*The next world war, if there is one, will be a war between civilizations.*

Sohail Mahmood,( 1995) *Islamic Fundamentalism in Pakistan, Egypt and Iran*, (Karachi: Vanguard Books Ltd.), p.223

*The JTWH was formed by Shukri Ahmad Mustafa in 1971. JTWH was one among many other similar underground circles that had been established by activists of the Muslim Brotherhood who had been incarcerated and tortured during Nasser's stifling of the movement in the late 1960s.*

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Yogindar Sikand, (2002), *The Origins and Development of the Tablighi Jama'at (1920-2000)*, (Hyderabad: Orient Longman Private Limited,)

*Writer in this book has mentioned the critiques of Brelwi, Ahl-e-Hadith and Jamat e Islami on Tableeghi Jamat in detail.*