

## **CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS FOR MUSLIM UMMAH IN THE PREVAILING GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT AND ROLE FOR PAKISTAN**

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The changing global strategic environment posed a serious challenge to the Muslim Ummah<sup>1</sup> in the aftermath of 9/11 terrorist attacks. The entire world focused its attention on the possible root-cause of terrorism, which allegedly were pointed towards some of the Muslim countries. The US 'war on terror' first in Afghanistan and then in Iraq totally shattered the unity and strength of the Muslim Ummah. The fact that the 'war on terror' was launched with the notion of 'with us or with the terrorists' led many of the Muslim neighbors of Afghanistan and Iraq to side with the international coalition against terrorism. Thus many of the Muslim countries not only became direct supporters of international war against Afghanistan and Iraq but also provided reasons for furthering the US 'war on terror' in other Muslim countries of the Middle East.

It was therefore, the collective will and strength of the Muslim Ummah and the religion of Islam, which became the global target of hate and abuse, thus posing a serious challenge to the very notion of Islam and Ummah. In the changing global scenario, where two of the Muslim countries are totally devastated and many more are seen as potential future targets, and Islam the religion of universal peace is being maligned and equated with terrorism, the Muslim world is in a very precarious position. At the one hand the Muslims have to restore the true image of Islam and on the other hand provide the real unity among the Muslim states to face these challenges.

Therefore, this paper is an attempt to analyze the challenges faced by the Muslim Ummah in the changing global environment developed after 9/11, the prospects of meeting these challenges and the role Pakistan can play in this regard. However, this paper is not an exhaustive analyses of all the challenges and prospects faced by

the Muslim Ummah but is an attempt to highlight major challenges only, which create crucial impact on the Muslim Ummah and Islam.

### **Prevailing Global Environment**

The end of Cold War and the demise of Soviet Union created a unipolar world, which professed the 'End of History' and 'triumph of western capitalism'. The new found global strategic environment gave an added overconfidence to the US, which set about the agenda of 'American Global Supremacy' in the world.<sup>2</sup> The regional happenings, first in Afghanistan and Central Asian, and then in the Gulf, both being the Muslim heartland, provided the US with a *casus belli* to directly intervene in regional affairs, which were considered detrimental to 'peace and security of the world'. Thus the US had already made its permanent presence in the Muslim heartland of 'Eurasia'<sup>3</sup> and aligned itself with regional players, which put the Muslim players of these regions into a totally disadvantageous situation. Therefore, the post Cold War period saw the weakening and waning of Muslim strength on the face of regional and international hagemon emerging/being created to undermine the opposing regional actors.

The post-9/11 global strategic environment further complicated the situation for the Muslim World. At the one hand Afghanistan and Iraq became the first victim of global 'war on terror' and many more being threatened, and on the other hand the very regimes in the Muslim World were being subject to close scrutiny and criticism, which had been supporting the US policies for the last many decades. The discussions about 'un-popular regimes', 'squandering of oil wealth', 'lack of gender equality', and 'terrorist breeding states' became the norm of the day in the print and electronic media of the Western world. In fact the media played a crucial role to target the Muslim World; both as a religion and the state. The forces inimical to Islam and Muslims, exploited the global strategic environment to unleash state terrorism to silence their internal opposition,<sup>4</sup> which were asking for their political and economic rights, enshrined by the international law and the United Nations.

In a situation like this, the very religion of Islam became the direct object of criticism by all and sundry. All kinds of accusations started appearing in all directions against Islam and the Muslims.<sup>5</sup> Forgetting even that the very notion of Islamic Jihad and the Muslims across the world were employed by the West to defeat the 'Evil Empire' in Afghanistan, which itself became a breeding ground for *Jihadis* with official patronage from the Western world. But now Islam became to be known as intolerant, extremist, anti-modern, rigid and terrorizing. The entire global campaign was launched to discredit Islam and the Muslim. Therefore, for many in the Muslim world, the West, especially the US tends to employ the war against terror to subjugate the Muslim countries in pursuit of an imperial agenda.<sup>6</sup>

Under these circumstances, the internal weaknesses of the Muslim Ummah in the shape of socio-economic underdevelopment, political non-representation, scientific and technological backwardness, military shortcomings, and strategic disorientation compounded the complexities. The Ummah by itself became an object of self-criticism and soul-searching in the absence of a united voice against international discrimination as an organization and entity.

### **Challenges Faced by the Muslim Ummah**

The foremost challenge is that Islam is being equated with terrorism. Despite condemnation of terrorism and terrorists activities by all the Muslim countries individually and through Arab League and Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) collectively,<sup>7</sup> terrorism has become synonymous with Islam and the Muslims. The entire Western media project discrimination against the Muslims regularly. Now even the Islamic religious symbols and institutions, like headscarf, beard and Mosque, are being ridiculed in non-Muslim world.<sup>8</sup> Every Muslim is being taken as a potential terrorist out to destroy the world at the first opportunity.<sup>9</sup> Added to this is the doctrine of preemption and unilateral military actions against Muslim countries without the mandate from the United Nations, which is being pursued with greater defiance by Israel and India; Syria was attacked by Israel as the allegation of terrorists hideouts in Syrian territory and Pakistan was

threatened with pre-emptive unilateral actions by India to wipe out the so called terrorist networks.

The other challenge is the political and economic deprivation, which has been employed constantly to suppress the Muslim populace. The control of economic assets-oil, gas, natural resources and cash deposits-by the multi-nationals are a source of economic exploitations and adding to the socio-economic miseries of the Muslims. For a vivid example, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia have now become international borrowers after having been most affluent Muslim countries. The permanent stationing of foreign troops in the Gulf after Kuwait crisis is added strains on the economies of Muslim states in the Gulf. Because the Muslim regimes are constantly being made fearful of different theories and notions to keep them busy in heavy military purchases/spending to benefit the Military Industrial Complexes and Multi-national Companies of the West.

Added problem to the above situation is lack of popular political participation in the Muslim World. The Muslim rulers try to perpetuate their regimes through borrowed security and ignore the popular support within their countries. It creates the wide gap between people and the rulers, which is often exploited by the external actors. The Shah of Iran had to flee, despite being the 'policeman of the Gulf' and Saddam had to hide despite his 'ruthless rule' and ultimately humiliated after being captured, highlight this political vacuum between the rulers and the ruled. Depriving the people to political participation adds to the deprivation syndrome and they not only become hostile to their own rulers but a ready source for internal security, which again benefits the external actors/factors. The 'democracy gap' separating the Muslim from the rest of the world is huge. In this regard it has been pointed out that only 11 out of 47 countries in the Muslim majority states are electoral democracies, or 23% as against 110 of the remaining 145 countries that accounts for 76%. Of the 16 Arab states in the Middle East, not one is classified as an electoral democracy.<sup>10</sup>

Moreover, the political problems of the Muslims, Palestine and Kashmir, still remain unresolved even after five decades of negotiations with numerous United Nation resolutions, constantly

defied by India and Israel, creates the undesired resolve of these two people to revolt and get their political rights through violent means. If this political deprivation is suppressed by state terrorism, it is a natural breeding source for violence and revolt.

The above problems at the one hand highlights the indifference of the Western world to the political rights of the Muslim people and on the other hand it shows the lack of unity in the Muslim world and put a question mark on the role of OIC. The Muslim countries are divided by various misperceived notions and have varying approaches to global problems, which even make them to clash in world forums. There is no united voice and Muslim leaders lack vision to grasp the global strategic dynamics, which can benefit the Muslim world.

The OIC came into being as an accident in the wake of Israeli occupation of Al-Quds in 1969. There were no organizational and well-conceived vision for the OIC, therefore, it remained adhoc even today. The very name of OIC, the Organization of Islamic Conference and not the Organization of Islamic Countries speaks about the short-sightedness of this organization. In the 34 years of its existence, the OIC has been unable to show any real progress in resolving the inter-Muslim disputes and raise a united voice against Muslim causes, it shows the ineffectiveness of this highest Muslim organization in the world, and adds problems for the Muslim people and their rightful-legitimate causes.

The above are some of the few crucial challenges, which the Muslim Ummah faces today, otherwise the list is very long and exhaustive. Now in this unfavorable environment, what are the prospects of these challenges being met by the Muslim Ummah, which can sail them through with success and trust.

### **Response and Prospects to meet these Challenges**

The very word of religion Islam means peace and Allah describes in the Quran that 'there is no compulsion in religion'.<sup>11</sup> The Divine message also reveals that the best religion is Islam,<sup>12</sup> and the followers of this religion wherever they are forms one Ummah, which is justly balance.<sup>13</sup> The entire life of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) is the

true reflection of peaceful nature of Islam, his living in Mecca under tremendous oppression and his establishment of City State of Madina, where Muslims, Jews and the non-believers lived together reflect the universal approach of peace. Then why the followers of this religion be treated and equated with terrorism, intolerance and religious extremism.

Probably the major cause lies within the Muslim world, some of the Muslims who deviated from the true path of Islam and created their own brand of Islam, dominated world's perception about the Muslims. Therefore, there is an urgent need to project the true and original path of Islam. That Islam, which was revealed and practiced by the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) and that resulted into Muslim forming the second largest religion of the world. Islam lays emphasis on self-correctness, *Jihad-e-Akbar* (the major struggle and strive), so Muslim have to correct themselves, be moderate, tolerant and modernist.

In this regard, President Pervez Musharraf has offered the idea of 'Enlightened Moderation', which is aimed at correcting the Muslim societies from within. This 'Enlightened Moderation' would not only correct the societal extremism, which has penetrated into the Muslim societies but would also help in to correct the image of Islam in the world.<sup>14</sup>

The related cause of Islam/Muslim bashing is a deliberate effort to project them as terrorist and religious extremist through print and electronic media by the vested quarters. However, it is important to note that no religion of the world entails extremism, intolerance and terrorism.<sup>15</sup> This requires the second remedy related to the self-correctness, that is to create a Muslim media channel to project political and strategic world view of the Muslim world. It has already been demonstrated by *Al-Jazeera*, how powerful and dreaded a Muslim channel can be. *Al-Jazeera* nullified the 'CNN/BBC effect' and on several occasions the channel was banned. The 9<sup>th</sup> OIC summit in Doha-Qatar authorized to establish such a channel and \$150 million were allocated in this regard but nothing substantive has been done in this regard for the last three years. There is an urgent need to operationalize this plan with all seriousness and dedication. This

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Muslim channel with an Islamic News Agency would not only project the true and original image of Islam and the Muslims and undo the media onslaught against the Muslims but would also project a united voice and approach of the Muslim world on global issues and regional problems.

It leads to certain inter-related responses to meet the prevailing challenges; education, economic development and people participation. Muslims were the greatest inheritor of knowledge and education, Muslims were the pioneer in scientific and technological innovations, and Islam makes obligatory on its followers, both male and female to seek knowledge from cradle to coffin, then why Muslim are lacking in education. No progress in the contemporary world is possible without science and education, therefore, the Muslim world must launch 'Educational Emergency' to make the entire Muslim world educated with special emphasis on science and technology. Then education brings awareness, tolerance, and understandings for others. People would be aware of their political and economic rights, which require from the Muslim rulers to involve masses into political process, give them right to exercise their right of free speech and expression. Democracy may not be the solution to every socio-economic problem<sup>16</sup> in the Muslim world but people's participation is necessary to do away with borrowed security umbrellas. The involvement of the people would give internal strength and the political divide between the ruler and the ruled would be bridged.

However, one should not overlook the important democratic gains that have been made recently in the Muslim countries. The September 2003 parliamentary elections in Morocco were the freest in that country's history; in October 2003 Bahrain voted to elect a parliament for the first time in 30 years, an election in which women also contested; in November 2003 parliamentary elections in Turkey brought into power a moderate-Islamic party; Saudi Arabia is to hold municipal elections first time in its history, and in Afghanistan some 20 parties have joined together in a broad coalition called the National Democratic Front that will provide a strong democratic alternative to the warlordism and fundamentalism in the proposed 2004 elections, in Iraq the people are demanding a democratically elected government.

These few examples manifest that the Muslims' identity with democratic and participatory governance is very much practiced.

The contemporary world is centered on geo-economics, which dominates global strategic interests of the regional and international actors.<sup>17</sup> There are very few countries in the Muslim world, which excel in economics and trade but generally there is a dismal performance. The trade within the OIC countries and at the regional and international trade blocs is alarmingly negligible and non-existence, which put the Muslim countries in competition against each other. The 57 OIC countries have over 1.25 billion population, possess 1/5<sup>th</sup> of the world landmass, 70% of world energy resources, and supply 40% of raw materials to the world. But as a group OIC has less than 5% of the world GDP, the collective GNP of all the Muslim countries stands at \$ 1200 billion whereas that of Germany's alone is \$ 2500 billion and that of Japan \$ 5500 billion. The trade and direct investment is also very dismal; OIC share in world trade is only 6-8%, hardly \$15 billion FDI is attracted by all OIC countries, which is equivalent to Sweden's or Thailand's alone, whereas China alone has more than \$50 billion of FDI. The human resource and technological disparity is even greater. The Ummah collectively can boast only of 500 universities and 1000 PhDs every year, whereas Japan alone has more than 9000 universities and Britain alone produces 2000 PhDs every year.<sup>18</sup> This is indeed an alarming state of affairs for the Muslim world.

In this regard President Pervez Musharraf proposed a joint economic and business commission of the OIC states, which would enhance cooperation and enable the Muslim countries to achieve the objectives of socio-economic prosperity.<sup>19</sup> The two decade old idea of a Common Islamic Market could be put into practice to create a trade bloc and boost trade within the Muslim world. Former Malaysian Prime Minister, Mahatir Muhammad's idea of rich Muslim countries investment in poor Muslim countries could bring about an economic revolution, which would be beneficial for the entire Muslim world.<sup>20</sup> However, till the time these ideals are not met, the Muslim countries should focus on internal trade and tap all international investment opportunities. A world already discriminatory politically and

economically against the Muslims, creates the compelling reasons to invest in developing Muslim countries.

The last but of course not the least is the restructuring of the OIC. The 34 years old house needs new leasing, new approach and vision, and some weight to implement its own decisions. The restructuring of the OIC was on the discussion agenda in the 6<sup>th</sup> OIC summit in Senegal in 1991 and 7<sup>th</sup> OIC summit in Casablanca-Morocco in 1994 but nothing concrete happened. However, it is heartening to know that on the initiative of Pakistan the restructuring of the OIC is already in the offing and the organization would be modeled to cater for contemporary needs.<sup>21</sup> Nonetheless, there is a need to organize summit meetings after every two years with minimum agenda to be deliberated upon and decided and implemented within the next two years. These summits should be issue oriented with an institutional framework for implementation of summit decisions and not merely meeting places of Muslim rulers.

### **Role for Pakistan**

Pakistan is an important country of the Muslim world in many spheres. Strategically, it is the frontline state against war on terror thus commands international importance. Geopolitically, it is situated almost in the heart of the Muslim countries and connects different regions of vital importance like Central Asia, Middle East and the Gulf, and South Asia. Technologically, Pakistan is one of the most advanced country in the Ummah, having mastery in various sciences. In terms of human resource and skill, Pakistan provides the backbone to many countries in the Ummah. Pakistan has been in the forefronts to voice and raise concerns for the cause of the Muslim countries and Islam. And in OIC, Pakistan holds special position along with Malaysia, Iran and Saudi Arabia. Therefore, Pakistan is in a position to help to revive the Muslim awakening and lead them into the 21<sup>st</sup> century with unity and prosperity.

In this connection Pakistan has already taken the lead in three different but inter-related fields; correcting the image of Islam and the Muslims; restructuring of the OIC; and emphasizing the need for science and technology. President Pervez Musharraf in his address to

the 10<sup>th</sup> OIC summit highlighted the need to correct the image of Islam and the Muslims for which he presented the idea of an 'Enlightened Moderation'. This enlightened moderation would have two prong strategy; one to correct the Muslim societies form within and shun intolerance, extremisms and religious fundamentalism; and two to resolve the Muslim political problems, like Palestine and Kashmir-the root cause of political deprivation of the Muslim hence ready grounds for all sorts of extremist tendencies.<sup>22</sup> The idea of 'Enlightened Moderation' was praised by the international community and also made part of the final declaration of the 10<sup>th</sup> OIC summit.

The related idea of restructuring the OIC was also presented by President Pervez Musharraf in the summit, for which he proposed a two way approach; one the assembling of experts/intellectuals from the Muslim countries who would place recommendations for restructuring; and two the convening of a special OIC summit at the end of 2004 to approve the recommendations and chalk out an effective mechanism to implement all the decisions. Again the proposal was not only appreciated but was made part of the final declaration in toto.<sup>23</sup>

Then Pakistan's leading role in education and emphasis on science and technology make it a leading country in the Ummah. Pakistan is the chairman of Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) Standing Committee on Scientific and Technological Cooperation (COMSTECH), with its headquarters in Islamabad. For this purpose funds were also allocated by the OIC member states and the work is in progress with speed and vigor. However, there is urgent need to start an 'Emergency Educational Program' in all fields of education to educate the Muslims in the members countries, because without education no progress in the modern world is possible.

Another important field in which Pakistan has the leading potential is the establishment of a Muslim media channel. This requires an urgent action on war footings because of the enormous disadvantages the Muslim world is facing in the absence of its own international media network. It was good to have \$150 million allocation in the 9<sup>th</sup> OIC summit in Doha-Qatar for this purpose but nothing substantive has been done in this regard. The experience of

Pakistan in the media development is an asset for the entire Ummah, which can benefit in this vital field. Pakistan, like other innovative and bold initiatives, must also take an initiative in this regard and lead the Ummah with practical benefits.

### **Conclusion**

The Muslim Ummah faces daunting challenges in the contemporary global environment. It needs to address the internal weaknesses and vulnerabilities, like disunity, reduction of poverty and illiteracy, and increased trade within. The 10<sup>th</sup> OIC summit in Malaysia was a good beginning to address these challenges and come out with practical solutions. To some extent the summit has been successful but it is yet to be seen that the summit decisions are also practically implemented.

Previously, the Muslim Ummah has met the challenges faced to it individually. Like Mahatir Muhammad of Malaysia led his country to economic miracles on the face of tough economic competition and US resistance, Muhammad Khatami of Iran refuted the 'Clash of Civilization' theory with wisdom and philosophy by presenting the theory of 'Dialogue Among Civilization', an idea that engulfed the entire world and the United Nations declared the year 2001 as the year for this purpose, and President Pervez Musharraf embarked on launching an international war against extremism and religious terrorism, which even endangered his own life several times, and Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah declaring a war against international terrorism. However, the time has come now for collective efforts to revitalize the Ummah, exploit its hidden potentials and lead the Muslims in the next millennium with dignity, trust and prosperity in political and economic spheres. The proposals presented at the 10<sup>th</sup> OIC summit in Malaysia, with Pakistan presenting key proposals, are efforts in this direction, however it is yet to be seen how soon the decisions are implemented. But one thing is sure that time is running out, it is time for the Muslim Ummah to remake the history with their strong will power or else they would become a history themselves. As Quran says, 'Verily never will Allah change the conditions of a people until they change it themselves'. (*Al-R'ad:11*)

**End Notes**

1. The word 'Ummah' is taken from Quran to describe the Muslim community of the world. However, the word is generally referred to the Muslim states, which are member of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC). But the member states of the OIC have different languages, cultures, traditions and world views, the only binding force for them is the religion of Islam. Therefore, the term Muslim Ummah would be used to describe the Muslim countries in the world, who are members of OIC.
2. There are various studies on the subject but see, Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth, "American Primacy in Perspective", *Foreign Affairs*, July-August, 2002, Martin Walker, "Bush's choice: Athens or Sparta", *World Policy Journal*, Summer 2001, and Joseph J. Sisco, "From World Disorder to a Reshaped Global Order: Myth or a Possible Opportunity?", *Mediterranean Quarterly*, Winter, 2002 to name a few.
3. A term coined by Brzezinski to highlight the geopolitical importance of the area for US foreign policy. For details see Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard: American Strategy and its Geopolitical Imperatives*, New York: Basic Books, 1997.
4. See Nazir Hussain, "Israel's State Terrorism and Regional Peace: Post 9/11 Scenario", *Strategic Studies*, vol. XXII, no. 3, Autumn 2002 and Fahmida Ashraf, "State Terrorism in Indian-Held Jammu and Kashmir", *Strategic Studies*, vol. XXI, no. 1, Spring 2001
5. See Samuel P. Huntington, "The Age of Muslim Wars", *Newsweek*, December 17, 2003, and Daniel Pipes, *A New Round of Anger and Humiliation: Islam after 9/11*, Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 2002.
6. See the speech of Mahatir Muhammad at the 10<sup>th</sup> OIC Summit at Putrajaya-Malaysia on October 16, 2003 at [www.bernama.com/oicsummit](http://www.bernama.com/oicsummit)
7. See Putrajaya Declaration of 10<sup>th</sup> OIC summit October 18, 2003 at [www.bernama.com/oicsummit](http://www.bernama.com/oicsummit)
8. See Madeleine Bunting, "Secularism gone mad", *The Guardian*, December 18, 2003.
9. Patrick Scale, "Has Bush administration declared a war on Islam", *Gulf News*, November 28, 2003.
10. Farrukh Saleem, "Facts on Ummah", *The News* (Daily Islamabad), October 26, 2003.
11. *Holy Quran*, Sura Al-Baqra, Verse 256.
12. *Holy Quran*, Sura Al-e-Imran, Verse 19.

13. Holy Quran, Sura Al-Baqra, Verse 143.
14. Inayatullah, "Putrajaya and enlightened moderation", The New October 21, 2003.
15. See Nazir Hussain, "Dialogue Among Civilisations in Asia and the World", The Iranian Journal of International Affairs (Tehran), vol. XIV, no. 1&2, Spring-Summer 2002.
16. See Doug Bandow, "Democracy for whom?", The Japan Times, October 31, 2003 and Ronald Meinardus, "Democracy: a most contentious ideal", The Japan Times, November 14, 2003.
17. Mirza Aslam Beg, "Harmonising global trends", The News, December 13, 2003.
18. From the speech of President Pervez Musharraf at the OIC Business Forum organized by the Asian Strategy and Leadership Institute at Putrajaya-Malaysia on 15<sup>th</sup> of October 2003 see at [www.bernama.com/oicsummit](http://www.bernama.com/oicsummit)
19. Ibid.
20. Text of the speech of Mahatir Muhammad to the 10<sup>th</sup> OIC summit at [www.bernama.com/oicsummit](http://www.bernama.com/oicsummit)
21. See Putrajaya Declaration of 10<sup>th</sup> OIC summit October 18, 2003 at [www.bernama.com/oicsummit](http://www.bernama.com/oicsummit)
22. See the speech of President Pervez Musharraf at the 10<sup>th</sup> OIC summit on 16<sup>th</sup> October 2003 at [www.bernama.com/oicsummit](http://www.bernama.com/oicsummit)
23. See Kaleem Omar, "Restructuring the OIC", The News, October 20, 2003, and Sultan Ahmed, "Making the OIC effective", Dawn, Islamabad, October 23, 2003.

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