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FUTURE OF CLASH OF CIVILIZATIONS

Abstract

The purpose of this article is to discuss the future of clash of civilizations and to emphasize the need for dialogue between civilizations. It first illustrates the essential points that now concern Islam as a factor in current international politics. *First*, the resurrection of Islam in global agenda is seen as a reaction to Western materialism and decaying culture. *Second*, it is the Muslim's inability or failure to respond to the Western modernization processes which is viewed as the factor for its resuscitation. The author argues that the future of clash of civilizations depends on two determinants - ongoing war on terrorism; and prospect of democratization and political legitimacy in the Muslim World. The author also argues that the paradox in Muslim societies is that the political elites always use religion to achieve their goals, on the one hand but violate the Islamic religious principles, on the other. By emphasizing the need for dialogue the author concludes that the politics and promises of

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dialogue depend much on how the parties, i.e. Islam and the West, tend to evaluate each other.

Introduction

The world has changed a lot since Samuel P. Huntington's polemical article, "Clash of Civilizations" came to everyone's knowledge, thereby inciting a number of academics, scholars, intellectuals and researchers around the globe to proliferate, at their own liberty, different visions about the future of world politics. In this connection, Huntington's much controversial idea that "the clash of civilizations will dominate global politics and that the fault lines between the civilizations will be the battle lines of the future"[2] was accepted by many writers as almost a gospel truth, and hence their efforts to find out the actual warriors in the mentioned battle. Quite unfortunately, in the list of warriors, it is Islamic civilization that has been portrayed as the enemy of all, and therefore, 'an odd man out' in world arena, that needs to be punished sooner or later.

True, if one tends to analyse civilizations in terms of religions, the world is then, in all likelihood, marching towards civilizational clashes mainly between Islam and other existing major civilizations. That Islam is now at war with all the major religions of the world is well expressed by Akbar S. Ahmed in the following words, "For the first time in history......Islam is in confrontation with all of the major world religions: Judaism in the Middle East, Christianity in the Balkans, Chechnya, Nigeria, Sudan, and sporadically in the Philippines and Indonesia; Hinduism in South Asia, and, after the Taliban blew up the statues in Bamiyan, Buddhism."[3] The problem, however, presents itself in a different way. More than Islam's clash

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[2] Samuel P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations", *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 72, No. 3, Summer 1993, p.1.

[3] Akbar S. Ahmed, *Islam Under Siege*, New Delhi, ,Vistaar Publications, 2003, p. 7

with other civilizations, it is the clash between Islam and the dominant Western civilization that, perhaps, has received the maximum attention in recent times, and has been the subject of world publicity, propaganda and media-blitz on a scale hitherto unknown. The West's 'next confrontation', observes M. J. Akbar, an Indian author, "is definitely going to come from the Muslim world. It is in the sweep of the Islamic nations from the Maghreb to Pakistan that the struggle for a new world order will begin".[4] Bernard Lewis comes to a similar conclusion when he says, "we are facing a mood and movement for transcending the level of issues and policies and the governments that pursue them. This is no less than a clash of civilizations – the perhaps irrational but surely historic reaction of an ancient rival against our Judeo-Christian heritage, our secular present, and the worldwide expansion of both".[5]

Thanks to the events of 9/11, henceforth the world is forced to accept Huntingtonian ideology, although with reticence, the clash between the West and Islam. His repugnance against Islam receives credence, and in no time the latter faces onslaught from the Western leadership, especially from the US. In this connection, the US led war against Afghanistan or Iraq does not wind up the story, what, perhaps, is more alarming is the attempt of the West to equate 'Islam with terrorism' by taking 9/11 event as a referent. Consequently, one notices an open attempt on the part of the West to bring Islam under the banner of *Al-Qaedism,* notwithstanding the fact that the former is totally opposed to the latter in fundamentals, tenets and beliefs. Needless to mention, *Al-Qaedism,* in no way reflects the Islamic teachings of tolerance. Today, in the name of Islam, the followers of *Al-Qaedism* are killing innocent people including children, destroying the properties and making life difficult for the ordinary

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[4] Quoted in Samuel P. Huntington, *op.cit.,* p. 10.
[5] *Ibid.*

Muslims everywhere. It is alleged that the ideology, despite being dangerous in nature, is gaining ground in many corners of the globe, i.e., South Asia, South East Asia, Russia, etc. In the circumstances, the questions that grapple every mind are: what then is the colour, nature of imminent clash of civilizations? Will bias, prejudice and compartmentalized thoughts of certain quarters keep the clash confined between Islam and the West in perpetuity? Where will be the battleground for the clash of civilizations, and who will be the winners and the losers respectively? No doubt, the questions have no clear-cut answers. However, they tempt one to draw a likely scenario on the situation.

The paper attempts to address the myriad of issues alluded to above. The objective is to illustrate the essential points that now concern Islam as a factor in current international politics and to highlight the future of clash and/or dialogue between civilizations. While depicting the future of clash of civilizations, the author is of the view that the future of clash of civilizations depends on two determinants - ongoing war on terrorism; prospect of democratization and political legitimacy in the Muslim World. Firstly, war on terrorism seems to have conclusively determined the 'road map' for clash of civilizations and the battleground on which such clashes would take place. Second important determinant of the clash of civilization in the future is, democratization and political legitimacy in the Muslim world. Though basic tenets of Islamic belief strongly support democratic concepts like *Shura* (consultation), *Ijtihad* (independent reasoning) and *Ijma* (consensus), most of the Muslim states have poor track record of achieving and implementing democratic ideals. In fact, democratization in the Muslim World has important bearing upon the future of inter-religious harmony. According to one author: "the conflict between Islam and democracy needs to be resolved for the attainment of closer co-operation between the Muslim, Christian and other

societies, for the promotion of democracy in Muslim countries, and for a more peaceful and stable global order."[6]   The paper has six sections. After introduction, a critical note is thrown on the following aspects: (i). Islam in the contemporary world; (ii). War on terrorism and the Muslim factor;   (iii). Democratization and political legitimacy in the Muslim World; (iv). Future of dialogue and coexistence. The paper ends with some concluding remarks.

II. Islam in the Contemporary World

The contemporary world is passing through the phase of globalisation which means not only eroding geographical boundaries, inter linked economy, being on information highway etc., but the homogenization of more traditions, beliefs and cultures as well. As a result, attempts are now underway to understand the global power structure in terms of civilizational divisions. In other words, understanding each of the world religions, and its impact, direct or indirect, on any global event.   While, to many, such an attempt may obfuscate other areas of common human interests, and that religion might further aggravate conflict and crisis like in Bosnia or Chechnya, the fact remains that religion, the hallmark of any civilization, can no longer be left alone in the backyard of contemporary global politics.

Here, it is quite amazing to find that of all the religions, it is Islam that has come to the forefront of current international relations. Two reasons may be cited to explain the phenomenon. *First*, the resurrection of Islam in global agenda is seen as a reaction to Western materialism and decaying culture. Such a viewpoint

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[6] Golam Hossain, "In Search of Democracy in Islam", in Niru Kumar Chakma and A.K.M Salahuddin, (eds) *Inter-religious Dialogue: Chance for Peace*, Dhaka, Goethe-Institut e.V., 2004, p. 80.

naturally projects Islam in its puritan form that opposes all excesses of materialism based on Western civilization. *Second*, it is Muslim's inability or failure to respond to the Western modernization processes which is viewed as the factor for its resuscitation. The two viewpoints behoove one to place Islamic and Western civilizations face to face, and make a comparison between the two.

After the collapse of communism, Islam was being perceived as the new enemy of the West. In different parts of the world, Islamic movements were seen by the West as potential challengers of Western political conceptions of the state, aimed at empowering Islamic clerics and forging transnational bonds. For instance, in *Out of Control: Global Turmoil on the Eve of Twenty-first Century*, a book published shortly after the demise of the Soviet Union, noted US strategist Zbigniew Brzezinski warned against an Islamic expansion to Central Asia, taking advantage of the power vacuum created by the collapse of the Soviet Union. He said: "Since nature abhors vacuum, it is already evident that outside powers, particularly the neighboring Islamic states, are likely to try to fill the geopolitical void created in Central Asia by the collapse of the Russian imperial sway. Turkey, Iran, and Pakistan have already been jockeying in order to extend their influence, while the more distant Saudi Arabia has been financing a major effort to revitalize the region's Moslem cultural and religious heritage. Islam is thus pushing northward, reversing the geopolitical momentum of the last two centuries".[7]

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[7] Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Out of Control: Global Turmoil on the Eve of Twenty-first Century*, New York, Maxell Macmillan, 1993, p. 159. Quoted in Louay M. Safi "Islam And The Global Challenge : Dealing with Distortion of the Image of Islam by the Global Media." Available at: http://www.islamonline.net/english/Contemporary/2002/05/article6-g.shtml

The events of 9/11, however, further aggravated West's concern about Islam and the Muslim states. Islamic fundamentalism is viewed as an expansionist movement that could threaten the international system in the long run. In the present global scenario, according to Joshua S. Goldstein of American University, USA, "Islamic activism (and the opposition to it) is more complex than simply a religious conflict; it concern power, economic relations, ethnic chauvinism, and historical empires as well."[8]

Islam's entry into the contemporary global political scenario is also highlighted by the fact that the post 9/11 world has been witnessing, among other things, a surge of intellectual works related to Islam and the Muslim society. Currently, in many Western universities, utmost focus is being given on various courses on Islam and Middle Eastern studies. In the flux, many scholars on Islam, joined by Muslim secularists and modernist scholars living in the West, are coming out with books, journals, articles etc. on issues like *jihad*, Muslim women and *pardah* (veil), *Madrasah* (Islamic religious schools) education etc., somewhat in a very erratic fashion. In such oeuvres, hate generating rhetoric against Islam and its social aspects is now the order of the day. As'ad AbuKhalil, a Professor of Political Science at California State University calls them "Islam Industry" in a review article in the *Middle East Journal*.[9] He says,

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[8] Joshua S. Goldstein, *International Relations*, Indian Reprint, Pearson Education, Fifth Edition, 2003, p. 208.
[9] See, As'ad AbuKhalil, "The Islam Industry and Scholarship" *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 58, No. 1, Winter 2004, pp. 130-137. In this article As'ad AbuKhalil reviewed several recent books on Islam and the Middle East. The subjects are varied and may offer readers interesting knowledge about the so-called "Islam Industry." The reviewed books are: *The Future of Political Islam* by Graham E. Fuller, New York, Palgrave, 2003; *Face to Face with Political Islam* by Francois Burgat, New York, I.B. Tauris, 2003; *The Crisis of Islam: Holy War and Unholy Terror* by Bernard Lewis, New

"we now have an "Islam Industry" – a popular and political culture
that encourages the production of books, articles, and movies that
deal with Islam and the Middle East."[10] He further says, "September
11th has only increased the rate of production of sensational works
that promise to reveal the true evil intentions of Muslims and Islam.
Scholarly works receive less attention; and the public seem eager to
consume books and articles that contain the persistent dogmas and
recycled cliches of classical Orientalism, or of the production of
terrorism industry.[11]" In fact, the objective behind some of such
endeavors is to project an archaic image of Islam, and the need for
Muslim societies to come out of medievalism and go for eventual
modernization from top to bottom in Western sense.

The irony of the fact is that most of such academic works,
written from propagandist angle with bias and prejudice, contain
half-truth, and miserably fail to reflect the on-going dynamics of the
Muslim society. In the face of a juxtaposition where Islam is seen as
an important factor in current international politics on one hand, and
a corresponding black image given to it, on the other, the Muslims
all over the globe definitely remain perplexed and confused. Amidst
this complex scenario, segregating religion – especially Islam, from

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York, The Modern Library, 2003; *What Went Wrong? Western Impact and
Middle Eastern Response* by Bernard Lewis, New York and Oxford, UK,
Oxford University Press, 2002; *Islam Unveiled: Disturbing Questions about
the World's Fastest-growing Faith* by Robert Spencer, San Francisco, CA,
Encounter Books, 2002; *Onward Muslim Soldiers: How Jihad Still
Threatens America and the West* by Robert Spencer, Washington, DC,
Regnery, 2003; *What the Koran Really Says: Language, Text, and
Commentary* by Ibn Warraq, Amherst, NY, Prometheus Books, 2002; *The
Quest for the Historical Muhammad*, ed. and trans. by Ibn Warraq, NY,
Prometheus Books, 2000; *Terror and Liberalism* by Paul Berman, New
York, W.W.Norton, 2003.

[10] *Ibid*. p. 130.

[11] *Ibid*, p. 131.

present global politics is inconceivable as it will be shying away from the thorniest issue of our time.

Concomitantly, while discussing Islam's entry into global politics, it is all pervading backwardness in Muslim societies that especially draw one's attention. Past glory, fame and reputation that Islamic civilization attained in the medieval period are now shelved in archives, and the Muslim society as a whole is now underrated and demeaned for its non-contribution to any aspect of modern development.[12] Many liberal Muslim scholars and policy makers

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[12] It is fashionable for all Muslims to be proud of their rich heritage and always cite examples of middle ages, but such complacency could make hardly any contribution to the modernization process or industrial revolution. Needless to mention that 'for the first six hundred years of its tenure, Islam was the world's most challenging religion, its strongest political force and its most vital culture'. Islam linked, for the first time in history, people from all the world – Spaniards, Black Africans, Egyptians, Turks, Persians, Indians, Southeast Asian with the Arabs. As stated in the Time-Life series, 'in its unifying role, Islam served to transmit more than one invention that proved crucial to the development of western civilization'. Muslim learned the technique of paper making from the captured Chinese and eventually relayed the process to Europe. 'Arabic numerals' were taken from India and transmitted to the Western world where they became standard mathematical symbols. Islam performed another vital service of incalculable consequence. The heritage of classical Greece – both scientific and philosophical – which has been lost to the West for centuries during the period in Europe known as Dark Age, was returned to the West through translations undertaken in the Islamic world. It is this resurgence of knowledge that fuelled Europe's Renaissance – that vital period that triggered the rise of Europe and its subsequent domination of the world. In medicine, Muslims enhanced Greek theory by practical observations and clinical experiments. Significant contribution was also made in chemistry, physics, and mathematics. The Muslims largely developed algebra, geometry, and particularly trigonometry. See, for details, Mahfuz Anam, *The Essence of Religion, Not its Rituals*, Souvenir on the Occasion of Rabiul Awwal 1425 Hijri, published by Institute of Hazrat Mohammad (SAW)., 2004.

admit the fact when they find that compared to Western civilization, Muslim civilization is weakening. As one author remarks, "It is inexcusable that a Muslim civilization that led the entire world for a thousand years in the arts and sciences today ranks near the bottom of world literacy rates."[13] Equally dismaying is the fact that Islamic civilization could not come out with any formidable ideology or philosophy to bring forth revolution in the very concept of development like the Protestant work ethic, which according to Max Weber, brought about industrial revolution in Europe and North America.[14] There is no gainsaying that the Muslim backwardness is observed not only in material aspects, but as well in the spiritual domain. While the reasons for such backwardness are many, the most often cited one is the failure to understand Islam itself. As Ziauddin Sardar argues, 'Muslim scholars, religious leaders, intellectuals, and people do not understand Islam'.[15] This hints at the point that while in the development of Muslim civilization, the role of knowledge or *ilm* was immense, the contemporary Muslim world is far behind other nations in this respect. The picture reveals a complete reversal of the teachings of Islam where knowledge has been exalted to a position wherefrom mankind can find redemption, spiritual salvation and as well earthly development. As clearly indicated in the sayings of the Prophet, "The acquisition of

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[13] Graham E. Fuller, "The Future of Political Islam," *Foreign Affairs*, March/April, 2002, p. 58.

[14] Quoted in UAB Razia Akhter Banu, "Challenges and Responses of Islam in the 21st Century", *Social Science Review*, Dhaka, Volume X1V, Number 1, June 1997, p. 113.

[15] Ziauddin Sardar, *The Future of Muslim Civilization*, London and New York, Mansell Publishing Limited, 1987, p. 72.

knowledge is a duty incumbent on every Muslim, male and female."[16]

This gap in knowledge between the Muslim society and the rest of the world compelled the former to accept many ideas and views, mostly originating from the West. Ideas like modernity, democracy, human rights and economic development etc., were inducted in Muslim societies either through colonialism or imposition. In the process, tension and conflict arose when such normative Western precepts needed legitimization and rationalization in terms of the long traditions of Islamic societies, in other words, strict conformity to *Shari'ah* for any proposed changes in the Muslim societies. Needless to mention, Islamic tradition of *Shari'ah* until the nineteenth century, provided the main, if not the complete, legal underpinnings of social and economic conduct in Muslim societies.[17] In today's global politics, the problematic dimension of Islam, therefore, lies in the Muslim societies' refusal to accept verbatim all that is propagated in the West under the etiquette of modern secularism. This, however, does not contradict the position of Islam, as according to mainstream Muslim psyche, Islam is suitable for all times and all places. However, this is a debate where Muslim countries are divided also.

III. 'War on Terrorism' and the Muslim Factor

In a scenario where Islam already finds itself in an incompatible, asymmetrical and contradictory position with other civilizations, in

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[16] Allama Sir Abdullah Al-Mamun Al-Suhrawardy (translated and edited) *Sayings of Muhammad (S.)*, Dacca, Society for Pakistan Studies, 1970, p. 108.
[17] Hamid Mowlana, "Covering Islam: Media and Its Impact on Muslim Identity" (online) *Institute of Islamic Studies*. Available at: http://www.islamic-studies.org/mawlana.html

particular the Western civilization, the 'war on terrorism' has further blackened its image, and seems to have erected an impregnable barrier between it and the West. Apparently, such a war seems to have conclusively determined the 'road map' for clash of civilizations and the battleground on which such clashes would take place. Once more, it is Islam that has fallen itself prey to the stratagem. The reasons for this are, probably, not far to seek.

A number of scholars in the post 9/11 period have taken unbridled liberty in directly equating terrorism with Islamic militancy, extremism or fundamentalism. What has probably fomented this liberty is the fact that the terrorist attacks on September 11, were committed by a band of Muslim radicals belonging to *Al-Qaeda* group. With the entry of 'new Muslim element' in the equation of terrorism, there came the eventual onslaught on the entire Muslim world that in the eyes of many appeared to be the breeding ground for all contemporary terrorist activities.

Currently, the war on terrorism is proceeding in full swing, and it is in the general Muslim psyche that the West has already occupied Iraq and Afghanistan.   Many Muslim countries are under surveillance and even a country like Saudi Arabia has become a state of concern for the West. While terrorist acts, by all logical conclusions, constitute a crime against humanity and call for a combat against it by all quarters, the Western, especially US reaction, in particular to the phenomenon draws one's attention. *First*, a virtual equation of the post 9/11 version of terrorism with Islamic militancy, extremism or fundamentalism by the U.S. leaders. *Second*, by defining the war on terror as a war against radical and militant expressions of Islam, the U.S.A has taken a wide-angle view

of the Muslim world.[18] *Third*, the U.S. seems to have deviated from its earlier segmented or 'country specific policy' towards the Muslim world. Many scholars tend to argue that in the post 9/11, the U.S. foreign policy vis-à-vis the entire Muslim world seems to be following a unified goal.[19]

It is very unfortunate that most of the European powers have started sharing similar views with the USA. No longer does Afghanistan figure as a heaven for *Al-Qaedas* in the Western calculation, rather, the entire Muslim world is now considered to be the hideout for the terrorists from the Western perspective. In the opinion of many, such elements in the Western policy would result in nothing other than accentuating the differences between Islam and the West. In the circumstances, the Muslims are under the impression that the Western relations with the Muslim world are likely to attain new colour and texture, which may not necessarily be conducive to the long-term relations between the two.

IV. Democratization and Political legitimacy in the Muslim World

The author argues that the second important determinant of the clash of civilization in the future is prospect of democratization and political legitimacy in the Muslim world. According to a recent Center for Strategic and International Studies report: "... despite the emergence of a few encouraging spots, such as Senegal, Mali, Bangladesh and the fledging attempts of Indonesia within the last few years to democratize, the majority of Muslim countries are under some form of authoritarian rule. In a number of Muslim countries,

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[18] M.A. Muqtedar Khan, "Nice But Tough: A Framework for U.S. Foreign Policy in the Muslim World", *The Brown Journal of International Affairs*, IX: 1(Spring 2002) pp. 355-362.
[19] *Ibid.*

such as Syria, Azerbaijan, and potentially Egypt, presidential dynasties have emerged, while in the Muslim states of Central Asia "presidents for life" have become the order of the day."[20]

The reasons could be many. But one of the major causes is that even the intrusion of Western ideas in the Muslim societies has not been successful in crystallizing appropriate political systems for the Muslims. The Muslim countries are, therefore, in a search for appropriate state systems for their respective polities. The demarche is not without its reasons. Many tend to believe that Islamic perspective does not conform to the Hobbesian conception about the necessity of state. In other words, Islamic political philosophy has not developed itself in a way to conform to the *Westphalian* concept of statehood, in particular for the reason that it rejects popular sovereignty. Thus, according to one critic, "Islamic thinkers had very little to offer by way of political doctrine. Islamic law had little to say on constitutional matters. Political practice was mostly authoritarian if not despotic."[21]

The Muslim scholars are now currently focusing on these issues knowing that much of their development trauma in the modern world has emerged from within. The concept of the primacy of *Shari'ah* and God's sovereignty—which make states accountable to God alone and free them from accountability to the people—may give power to a social elite and establishes a type of tyranny of the *Ulema*, which is best exemplified in the case of Iran. This no doubt undermines freedom and encourages authoritarian states. To establish an Islamic democracy, a free society must be created first

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[20] Shireen T. Hunter, "Modernization and Democratization in the Muslim World: Obstacles and Remedies," [online] April 2004, Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), Washington, D.C. Available at: http://www.csis.org/islam/index.cfm

[21] Emmanuel Sivan, "The Clash within Islam," *Survival*, Vol. 45. No. 1, Spring 2003, p. 38.

where all Muslims can debate what constitutes the *Shari'ah*.[22] According to the *Holy Quran* that there is no compulsion in religion. God wants his believers to worship him and obey out of free faith, not from fear of some state.[23]

In the democratization process, freedom of expression – a key indicator of democracy, is another area contributing to the gap between Islam and the West. Given the fact that freedom of expression is predicated upon the nature of a country's political system, it cannot be expected to be in full blossom in the authoritarian Muslim societies. Thus, be it Jakarta, Riyadh or Cairo or in any other city of a predominantly Muslim state, the freedom of expression remains captivated in varying degrees. In the circumstances, with limited political freedom, free media is a far cry in most of the Muslim countries. For instance, in the Middle East, media rarely can take any anti-establishment tone. In Pakistan, as per the defamation ordinance, the offending publisher and journalist could be fired and sent to jail. In Bangladesh, it is alleged that successive governments try to influence the media through distribution of advertisements etc. In Turkey, independent journalists are often imprisoned if their views and ideas go contrary to the regime's interests.

Ironically, this perverse phenomenon exists in the Muslim societies against the very teaching of Islam. The Muslims are unaware that Islam, as a religion, has given utmost importance to the expression of truth. The *Holy Quran* and *the Hadith* (Sayings of Prophet Muhammad SM) have clearly opposed any form of deception and concealment of truth. The Quran says: "Confound not

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[22] M. A. Muqtedar Khan, "The Priority of Politics: A Response to Islam and the Challenge of Democracy," *Boston Review*. This online paper is available at www.ijtihad.org
[23] *Ibid.*

truth with falsehood, nor knowingly conceal the truth" (2: 42). The Prophet says "Strive always to excel in virtue and truth." The Prophet and the *Khualafa-ur-Rashidun* (four rightly-guided Caliphs of Islam) allowed every citizen to express freely, even against them. If these are the core values of Islam, then by all conclusions, the Muslim societies are far from realizing such values. In contrast, in the West, such rights are guaranteed for every citizen.

It is also ironical that many rulers in Muslim states play their Islam card for electoral purposes. In their campaign, they project themselves to be the true followers of Islam. Their anti-west rhetoric and imposed *Islamization* of their the societies are often criticized in the Western media. In brief, the paradox in Muslim societies is that, political and commercial elites use religion on one hand, and violate the Islamic religious principles, on the other. In the process, the victims are the common people. Quite surprisingly, the Muslim countries and the organisations like OIC or Arab League have rarely taken any initiative for the professional development of media in their societies. In fact, when any country's prime concern is to suppress the truth, and divert public attention, it can in no way promote a free media or freedom of expression. It is under such conditions that the West finds it very difficult to accommodate with Muslim societies despite the enormous opportunity for freedom of expression created by the on-going globalisation process, and the revolution in communication technology. Such atmosphere is creating a kind of "cultural war" between Islam and the West. On issues of gender or women rights, religious intolerance, terrorism, corruption, children rights – perception between the Muslim states and their regimes with the West is widening day by day. In many such cases Western countries are compelled to believe that these are the problems of Islam, rather than the problems of Muslim population or more precisely, their rulers.

V. Future of Quest for Dialogue

Against this backdrop, the politics and promises of dialogue depend much on the mutual perceptions of the each other. If any one goes through the proceedings of few recently held conferences on 'dialogue between civilizations', one will notice the way liberal Muslims are being sandwiched by the twin pressures. One from the secularists of their co-religionists, and the other from the Westerners. But liberal Muslim or to say, practicing tolerant/moderate Muslim represent the mainstream of the Muslim society. Neither the West nor the Muslim societies would gain much if the viewpoints of mainstream moderate Muslims are not taken into cognizance, and if they are marginalised. The phenomenon is not uncommon in Muslim societies when the secularists, who defy the religion totally, take the stage bypassing the mainstreams, thereby leaving much room for the extremists to come forward. A recent RAND report also observes that "The battle for Islam will require the creation of liberal groups to retrieve Islam from the hijackers of religion."[24] Hence, there must be discourse in the academia whether rejuvenating the dialogue would be within religious communities, or within civil society or within extremist groups. By all logical conclusions, any attempt to impose secularism as an external dogma on the Muslim societies like in the Middle East will not yield any positive result in the long run.

In this context, Muslims feel that Western stereotypes are greatest hindrance in the process of peaceful coexistence. For instance, the West should understand that much of the Muslims grievances are not related to their religion as such. The Palestinian issue, Western dominance of oil, Western cultural dominance, non-democratic environment in the Middle Eastern countries – these are not directly related to religious issues. "The vast majority of

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[24] Angel M. Rabasha et. al., "The Muslim World after 9/11," RAND, Project Air Force, 2004, USA. Available at: http://www.rand.org.

Muslims have no intentions to engage in clash with other civilizations nor wish to have 'interests' in the Gulf of Mexico or the English Channel, which would then need to be protected through clashes. In fact, where there are clashes in the Islamic world today, such as in Palestine, Kashmir, or Chechnya, it is always the question of Muslims seeking to protect their own rights, freedoms, or land that have either been taken away or are being threatened, and not to conquer others and then try by force to rule over them."[25] The events of 9/11 was not certainly attack on the Christian faith, rather the act of some deviated groups within Muslim society who expressed their anger in a ruthless way.

If twentieth century is marked by violence, deaths of innocents and destruction of properties, the West has to think to what extent Muslims are responsible for all such acts. After all, the greatest horrors and killing machines in history stemmed from the Western, secular ideologies of fascism and communism."[26] Though political Islam or militant Islam has become Western countries' top strategic agenda, but for Muslim states this is not a new challenge. They have faced an ever-growing Islamic opposition in the past decades. Islamic militancy has led to regime change in Iran (1979), the assassination of the Egyptian President Anwar al-Sadat (1981), a wave of political violence and assassinations in Algeria, Taliban successes in Afghanistan (1996), the ongoing Kashmiri Islamic mobilization and guerilla war that has impacted on the domestic politics of Pakistan and challenged India, on-going separatist pressures in Aceh and inter-communal violence in Indonesia.[27] Such

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[25] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "Civilization Dialogue and the Islamic World," [online] *Encounters: Journal of Inter-Cultural Perspectives*. Available at: http://www.islamonline.net/english/Contemporary/2004/08/article01c.shtml
[26] Graham E. Fuller, *op.cit.*, p. 60.
[27] Shahram Akbarzadeh and Abdullah Saeed (eds) *Islam and Political Legitimacy*, London, Routledge, Curzon, 2003, p. 1.

militancy is also prevalent among other cultures, but history is replete with such evidences that democratization process can significantly contribute towards combating terrorism and religious and political militancy.

In dialogue between civilizations, both the USA and Europe have their own and specific roles to play. As far as the USA is concerned, according to M. A. Muqtedar Khan, "...the United States should put together a social aid package that will promote education, respect for women's rights, understanding of the principles of democracy, and help build institutions that will integrate local and global knowledge. This comprehensive package will enable underdeveloped Muslim societies to embark upon sustainable development programs."[28] Though Europe's role is very important in dialogue, they have done little to solve the problem of Palestine, other than expressing occasional rhetoric to their cause. This is further compounded by the activities of France in the name of secularism, which Muslims have started believing as a kind of secular fundamentalism. Not before many days, Alexandre del Valle (the pseudonym of a right-wing French writer) wrote that both Islam and the USA are joined in a cultural offensive against Europe; Michael Jackson and McWorld on one side, radical Islamic movements on the other, have one goal, the destruction of the European nation state. This 'Islamoyankee' offensive rests, he argued, on a spiritual affinity between Protestantism and Islam.[29] One can only hope that this argument will not be subscribed to by Europe as a whole.

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[28] M.A. Muqtedar Khan, Spring 2002, *op. cit.*, p. 361.
[29] Quoted from original French book in Fred Halliday, "West encountering Islam: Islamophobia reconsidered," in Ali Mohammadi (ed) *Islam encountering Globalization*, London, RoutledgeCurzon, pp. 17-19.

VI. Concluding Remarks

In fact, the Muslims are very much concerned with the fact that the current nature, complexities and dynamics of the war on terrorism will foster clash of civilizations and impede dialogues at diplomatic fronts. This is because, Islam and terrorism are now being considered as two sides of the same coin by various interested quarters. Still more worrying for the Muslim is the orbit of such war. In other words, will the war remain confined within the Muslim boundaries or it be extended to other states as well? While all such eventualities are yet to be unfolded, the final result of the war, whatever may it be, will definitely have impact on the future of the world. The author finds another factor entering the scene, i.e., the development within the Muslim societies and queries if such societies would be able to bridge between their faith and freedom – the freedom may be in Western sense, but in many areas it does not contradict with Islam as well.

Having said that it can also be pointed out that a revolution is underway within an insignificant portion of the Muslim societies to redress the roots of their trauma and backwardness. Consciously or unconsciously, the phenomenon is being overlooked by the West. Responses to such challenges will set the context and extent of divisions or coexistence between civilizations in near future.

It should be borne in mind that Muslim countries are in the Third World and share much of the problems of mis-governance and corruption. "For Muslim countries the challenge is now to make globalisation work in favour of an Islamic variation of modernity. They do not need slavish imitation of the West, but rather, a selective appropriation of its cultural fare: integration not assimilation; joining the world to which Muslims have a lot to offer, without being

swallowed by it."[30] The Muslim countries, especially in the Middle East, should engage in democratization process as early as possible, and it is possible within Islamic framework. In this regard, noted Muslim political scientist Prof. Ali A. Mazrui asks the most pertinent question: "If Scandinavians can combine liberal democracy with socialist principles, and the English can combine a formal Protestant theocracy with a practical liberal democracy, can Muslims combine liberal democracy with Islamic principles? Can *islamocracy* be a new vision of governance?"[31] But the question is: Will Western countries support and recognise this Islamic version of democracy in the Middle Eastern Muslim societies?

Any perception about Islam by the other civilizations would be based on principally Islam's current position vis-à-vis terrorism. In the Muslim world, it is now encouraging to note that voices against terrorism are rising, especially among the religious clerics. Moderates are helping Muslims to understand 'which is permissible and which is not'. This stance is being acclaimed by the West as well.

Islam has long and proven history of peaceful coexistence with other religions. Islam and the West have coexisted for fourteen centuries. No doubt, that there have been periods of war, but many more periods of peace. Until the 1940s, minorities — and particularly Jews — were persecuted less under Muslim rule than

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[30] Emmanuel Sivan, *op.cit.*

[31] Ali A. Mazrui, "*Islamocracy*: In Search of a Muslim Path to Democracy," Speech of Prof Ali A. Mazrui at the Fourth Annual Conference of the Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy, Washington D.C. May 16, 2003. Available at: http://www.islam-democracy.org/4th_Annual_Conference-Mazrui_address.asp

under any other majority religion. That is why the Middle East was for centuries' home to many minorities.[32]

Finally, meaningful dialogue can only take place between two equal parties. In the process of dialogue Muslim countries' assertiveness is expected and also required is the exploitation of leverages they have at their disposal. Understanding the sensitivities of each other is indispensable. No time, given the rapidly changing global context; time is now ripe for forging a global civilization by dialogue; everyone must come to rescue the world civilization. Interfacing between the civilizations is much more required then sticking to the more rigid definitions of the boundaries and therein lies the future of the mankind and our world.

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[32] See, Fareed Zakaria, *The Future of Freedom: Illiberal Democracy at Home and Abroad*, W.W. Norton and Company, 2003.