

GLOBALIZATION: ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE, CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

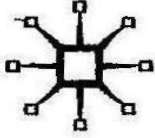
POVERTY IN MUSLIM COUNTRIES AND THE NEW INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC ORDER

Reference to be provided by Prof. Khurshid

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Globalization: Islamic Perspectives, Challenges and Prospects

Khurshid Ahmad

Every age has its own fads and clichés. In our times 'globalization seems to have become one, or so at least a sizeable section of the intellectual and political community of the world surmises; I have my reservations. Looking at the developments of the last two decades suggests that globalization no longer seems to be a mere fad or cliché: it is now assuming the position of a framework for re-ordering the world. As such, is it imperative for the Muslim *Ummah* in particular and for the people of the Third World in general to have a deeper understanding of what is happening? We must try to sift the grain from the chaff. We have to find out what aspects of it are useful and as such desirable and acceptable, and what others are injurious and as such have to be resisted, modified or adapted to suit our conditions, needs and aspirations. The claim of *inevitability* and *universality* has to be taken with a pinch of salt. However, our response should be positive as well as creative, as isolation and autarky are not an option.

My first submission as a student of history and as a Muslim is that globalization is not something new. So far as the Muslim *Ummah* is concerned its very existence is based on certain universal values, articles of faith, concepts and principles that provide the intellectual and conceptual foundations for globalization. We believe in Allah Who is Lord of the Worlds and Creator of the heavens and the earth. We believe in all the Prophets of Allah. The holy Qur'an testifies that they and their people belonged to one *Ummah*.

This community of yours is One community, and I am your Lord; so hold Me alone in fear. (*Qur'an*, 23:52)

Verily, this community of yours is a single community, and I am your Lord; so worship me. (*Qur'an*, 21:92)

O men fear your Lord, Who created you from a single being and out of it created its mate; and out of the two spread multitudes of men and women. Fear Allah in Whose name you plead for rights, and heed the ties of kinship. Surely, Allah is ever watchful over you. (*Qur'an*, 4:1)

The *Qur'an* also makes it very clear that while human beings have been made into tribes and nations, something very natural and inevitable, this is only for mutual identification. All human beings, all races and ethnic groups are equal and the only basis for superiority, greatness or leadership is moral excellence and not otherwise:

O mankind! We created you from a single [pair] of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know each other. Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of Allah is he who is the most righteous. And Allah has full knowledge and is well-acquainted with all things. (*Qur'an*, 49:13)

So the conceptual framework of Islam and the Muslim *Ummah*, by definition is global. In fact, it may rightly be claimed that Islam provides par excellence the intellectual and moral foundations for an appropriate and sustainable conceptual framework for globalization.

Historically speaking the Muslim *Ummah* is the best example of a universal community. From Prophet *Nuh's* flood to our own times, the spread of this *Ummah* is and has been global. Today there are some 57 independent Muslim states with over 900 million people living therein, and another 400 million Muslims spread throughout the length and breadth of the rest of the world. Consequently in every part of the world there is some Muslim presence; in most cases, quite a significant one.

Globalization as a political, economic, cultural and technological process is not that new. Throughout history there have been waves of globalization and the critical vehicles for these processes were *migration, trade and conquest*. What is new in our times is the *spread*,

the *scope*, the *speed* and finally the *structure* of globalization. These features are going to characterize the current trend towards global integration with liberalization, de-regulation, privatization and hegemonic contours of capitalism and American power. That makes it unique! It is in this context that the limitations of time and space are being annihilated and the entire world is willy nilly becoming one 'global village'.

The most significant aspects of the contemporary phase concern revolutions in technologies relating to transport and communication and the processes of instant transfer of information. Swift global interactions and decision-making via new information arrangements are having far-reaching effects on the whole matrix of worldwide relations including the movement of goods, services and financial flows. These represent developments with far-reaching consequences: moral, ideological, economic, cultural and political. In view of the dominant paradigm of power and civilization, America and Europe remain major players in the making of this New World Order. American military power and its outreach, political influence, economic strength, command over technology and almost total control over the media (bordering on virtual thought-control) have given globalization a distinct Euro-American identity. In the name of the promotion of liberalization, privatization, market economy and modernization, the hegemony of the Western norms, values, life-styles, socio-economic institutions and finally political and economic interests is being established over the length and breadth of the world. Along with the state players, three other powerful actors are dominant in the field. These are (i) *multinational corporations*, (ii) *international NGOs* and (iii) *the media*. Taken together, they are playing a decisive role in bringing about what can be described as the emergence of hyper-imperialism, innocently called 'globalization'.

There is nothing wrong with globalization as such, but the real problem arises because of five major issues, in relation to the current phase of globalization, and they are not being addressed honestly and judiciously, particularly by the leaders of the Muslim world, which is bearing the brunt. First and foremost is the fact that there exist gross asymmetries of political power, military strength and levels of technological and economic development in different parts and countries of the world. Foreign rule is not new in history: but what is unique about European colonialisms, which have held sway

over the world for the last four centuries, is that during this period, for the first time ever, a large-scale physical transfer of resources took place from the colonies to the colonial overlords, the so-called mother countries. Consequently, the erstwhile global balance was destroyed and a new global arrangement appeared which established the hegemony of the Western hemisphere and marginalized all other regions, cultures and people. This was further aggravated through selective and lop-sided development during the twentieth century, a process that continues despite the apparent success of de-colonization. The result is that a strong centre-periphery relationship has been built into the global system, on political, economic and technological levels, which is producing serious deformities and inequities.

While the per capita income in Europe/America, and the Muslim world/rest of the Third World up to the end of the eighteenth century was within a differential of 1:2 (in certain parts of the world the imbalance was in favour of the Muslim world), the trend changed from the nineteenth century with the result that now 87 per cent of the world's GDP is produced in 22 rich countries while the rest of the world (consisting of some 170 countries and over four-fifths of the population) tries to survive on only 13 per cent of total GDP. As against this, in 1800 Europe's share in the world's manufacturing output was hardly 28.1 per cent, America's was less than one per cent while that of the rest of the world, the so called Third World of today, was almost 67.7 per cent. The share of the Muslim world was around 40 per cent of total GDP. This shift in global wealth has completely distorted the balance of power in the world and created a situation where liberalization and globalization only accentuate disparities. The distribution of wealth is grossly skewed, not only globally but also within the regions and amongst the population.

There are gross inequalities of wealth and income within the developed and under-developed world. According to a CNN survey carried out in September 2003, only 40 billionaires owned US\$955 billion, which is greater than the total wealth of almost 30 per cent of Third World countries, the abode of over 1.2 billion people. While over a billion persons in the world live on less than US\$1 a day, the European Union gives a subsidy of US\$2 per cow per day. In Japan this subsidy is US\$7.5 per cow per day. Even in the richest country of the world, the USA, whose GDP is 26 per cent of the world GDP, over 12 per cent of people live below the poverty line.

This asymmetry of economic wealth is accompanied and accentuated by asymmetry in political power and military strength. The expenditure of the US alone on its war machinery is equal to the combined defence expenditure of all the other countries of the world. US forces are stationed in some 40 countries with an outreach to every corner of the globe. Technology has reached the point where any target in the world can be struck from the US command in Florida. Most countries are dependent on US arms systems and supplies for their defence. The US accounts for 48 per cent of world exports of arms and defence systems.

In a world like this, totally unmanaged competition and absolutely unregulated liberalization can only be to the disadvantage of the poor and the under-privileged. Moreover, those who stand for liberation insist on liberation of the capital markets and flow of goods and services, but not on free movement of labour. That is why it has become an instrument for neo-colonialism and the virtual establishment of the hegemony of the powerful over the rest, particularly of the one super-power. Unless there are safeguards for those who are weak and as such disadvantaged, globalization cannot but aggravate a process through which the poorer countries of the world will be further marginalized, if not decimated, in terms of economic and political influence on world affairs. This is the concern of people not only in the Third World, but also of those who care for justice and fair play anywhere in the world, something symbolized by protests from Seattle to Cancún.

Second, globalization is taking place in the absence of any just and agreed juridico-political and economic infrastructure at the global level. The legal, political, economic and financial architecture of the world is out of tune with the demands of healthy, sustainable and equitable globalization. Good governance is not merely a national virtue: it is also vital for the global community. The UN and its organs, and the Bretton Woods infrastructures built after the Second World War, reflect and perpetuate the equation of power at that time. The demise of the Soviet Union has further tilted this balance in favour of the only remaining super-power. New institutions which could ensure security and justice for all the countries and peoples of the world are conspicuous by their absence. America's refusal to accept the authority of the International Criminal Court, ratified by over 80 countries, and its unilateral withdrawal from the Kyoto Protocol is

an index of the incongruity of power and the poverty and deficiencies of the global infrastructure. The result is obvious. One super-power is now calling all the shots and regards itself as being above all law. In fact it is acting in a manner that is contemptuous towards international norms of behaviour and is arrogating to itself the right to disregard even its own constitution. It can violate any international treaty, walk out of any international institution, invade any part of the world in the name of a 'pre-emptive strike' and in pursuit of its alleged 'right' of 'regime change'.

Globalization can be successful and become a blessing only if there is a global infrastructure ensuring good governance, equitable opportunities of participation for all and a commitment by everyone to respect recognized processes for the dispensation of justice amongst all nations and peoples. There is talk of democratization as part of the globalization agenda, but there is no concern for making the global players – the UN Security Council, the IMF, the World Bank, the Non-Proliferation Treaty, you name them – more democratic. Similarly, if the people of a country choose, of their own free will, an alternative culture, political strategy or economic order and are not prepared to follow the liberal US-European model, their verdict is disregarded with impunity. Democracy no longer means the will of the people of every country; it only means surrender to the wishes and preferences of the dominant powers. This makes the whole process of democratization a sham. Democracy cannot be imposed from outside: it can only evolve from within. This is the problem with *forced* liberalization and *imposed* openness. Are they not contradictions in terms?

Third, globalization needs a particular mindset and an approach based on commitment to and respect for universal values and principles. Globalization with a parochial or nationalistic mindset and in pursuit of hegemonistic ambitions for a particular nation, system or civilization cannot but be a menace to mankind. Globalization can succeed and become a blessing for all only if it is rooted in *shared* universal values and a commitment to the processes and traditions of respect for *plurality* and acceptance of *variety* and differences as authentic. This calls for a very different psychological and moral approach; it demands an approach based on values and geared to achieving the common ideals of justice and fair play for all. This is not possible in a climate of obsession only with national interests, unilateralism, cultural arrogance and imperialistic ambitions.

Free trade is a virtue only if it is also fair trade, which is also the case for every other aspect of international contact and cooperation. What we are witnessing today is a globalization without this sea-change in the psychology of the leadership, its mindset, and also the dynamics for the use of power at the global level. The dominant paradigm is fundamentally flawed. Change within this paradigm cannot deliver. What is needed is a change in the paradigm itself. Without a new moral and ideological dispensation the dream of a just global order would remain unfulfilled.

This brings me to the fourth important dimension. The new paradigm to ensure healthy and fair globalization must be based on the values of (i) freedom with responsibility; (ii) individualism tempered with social concern and solidarity; (iii) competition with cooperation and compassion; (iv) efficiency and the profit motive combined with justice and fair play; and (v) power combined with rule of law and accountability to ensure universal and shared prosperity. What I am suggesting calls for a major paradigm shift from the dominant civilizational paradigm of the West, which remains one-sided despite the fact that this one-sidedness is rooted in partial reality. This one-sidedness comes from its emphasis on freedom, individualism, the profit motive, competition, liberalization, efficiency and power without incorporating within the model the other coordinates of responsibility, solidarity, cooperation, compassion, justice and accountability.

Lastly, the central issue is whether globalization is to take place in the context of the hegemony of one power (now actually a super-power) and one economic system, capitalism, or whether it takes place in the framework of a *pluralistic world* where different cultures, religions and socio-economic systems can flourish without the overlordship of one or a few powerful players. Free movement, dialogue, competition and interaction at the global level can lead to freedom, well-being and opportunity for all, but only if this takes place against a backdrop of genuine diversity, plurality, respect for the rule of law and supremacy of shared values. This is not possible if only a few dominate while others are expected and forced to follow and succumb.

This brings me to the role of Islam and the Muslim *Ummah* in influencing and shaping the future course of globalization. Globalization presents a unique opportunity to Islam and the Muslim *Ummah*. The Western creeds of liberalism, colonialism, secularism, nationalism and capitalism have proved to be parochial and regional, as well as

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race; class; and culture-specific. They have failed to prove their capacity to provide fair and equitable opportunities to all human beings. Justice and compassion for all humans remain elusive and unattainable.

While certain positive and creative dimensions of these concepts and ideologies cannot be denied, their limitations and negative contributions outnumber their positive contributions and potentials. The result is undeniable: globalization within the framework of these concepts is creating menacing problems and is escalating serious conflict situations for humanity in every part of the world. The twentieth century has been the bloodiest century of history. It witnessed some 200 wars including two world wars, resulting in the deaths of over 100 million people and the destruction of vast areas all over the globe. More of the same cannot but be fatal.

New attitudes and new approaches are needed, which are genuinely universal and capable of providing freedom and opportunity to all, and which can ensure fair play for all people and countries, irrespective of their faith, culture, politico-economic system, or position on world affairs. Democracy is a great virtue and an invaluable blessing for humanity, but it can only flourish globally if there is genuine scope for plurality, respect for the rights of all, effective accountability for those who disregard the demands of law and established norms and equality of opportunity for the weak and the strong alike. Otherwise democracy will remain a form without substance and may degenerate into a sham and a farce.

Media and the free flow of information are the major building blocks for a free society; but because of monopolistic overtones and manoeuvrings they can become vicious instruments of thought-control, mind-manipulation and intellectual colonization. Technology is a blessing, but it can also turn into a monster: a vehicle for the subjugation and decimation of other peoples, morally, militarily and culturally. Globalization is a great opportunity, but the weaker players can become genuine players and seize the opportunities it offers only if there is a new mindset and a fresh approach, which is universal and pluralistic and is operationalized in the context of a global framework that establishes supremacy of law and ensures equality of opportunity to all.

Islam, with its fundamental value of *tawhīd* (oneness of God) and consequently of the oneness of mankind, the supremacy of the moral over the material, the integration of the spiritual and mundane,

Islam's over-riding commitment to justice, beneficence and compassion (*al-'adl wal-ihsān*) for all and its insistence on *shūrā* (consultation) as the process for decision-making at all levels, can provide a framework for genuine globalization that could be a blessing for mankind.

However, this would be possible only if the Muslim *Ummah* is prepared to take stock of its own present position and choose to pursue a path which is truly representative of the Islamic ethos. The present state of the Muslim *Ummah* is rather disenchanting. The Muslims, by and large, are not behaving as true representatives of Islam, individually and collectively. Economically, the Muslim world is poor and dependent on the West. Politically it is divided like a set of ninepins. Culturally it seems to be in a melting pot. In the field of education, research and technological development it is far behind the rest of the world. The combined GDP of all the 57 Muslim countries of the world is less than 5 per cent of the world's GDP or, to put it differently, less than the GDP of one European country, Italy (which itself rates as the fifth or sixth largest economy in the world). The bulk of the Muslim world's financial resources is in the hands of, or under the management of, American and European banks and investment and management houses. Muslims have developed a consumer economy without a sustainable production base. Despite all their wealth and resources, almost all the Muslim countries are languishing under the weight of foreign and domestic debt, in quite a few cases with menacing consequences.

Militarily, Muslims are not only dependent on the West, but are helplessly caught in its grip. Despite all the expenditure on defence, Muslim countries have not been able even to face the threat that has been hammering the Arab and Muslim world for over 50 years from the 'tiny' (yet armed to the teeth) entity of Israel. The state of political freedoms, level of the participation of the people in the economy and polity, and equitable sharing of wealth and power within Muslim societies is in a very bad shape. Unless Islamic countries can set their own house in order, it is unrealistic to think that Islam and the Muslim *Ummah* can play their rightful role in the current phase of globalization.

The situation is not hopeless. There are certain positive developments and there is definitely light at the end of the tunnel. But these opportunities can be seized only if, on the one hand, Muslims seriously strive to overcome their weaknesses and drawbacks, and on the other they open up a meaningful civilizational dialogue with the rest of

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the world, particularly the West, as an *Ummah* with a mission. As the *Qur'an* says: 'And it is thus that We appointed you to be the community of the middle way, so that you might be witnesses before all mankind and the Messenger might be a witness before you' (*Qur'an*, 2:143). If this mission is pursued diligently and with perseverance, then God's promise is very clear: 'Do not, then, either lose heart or grieve; for you shall surely gain the upper hand if you are true men of faith' (*Qur'an*, 3:139).

The promise of success tests on a clear condition, and that is *in kuntum mo'minin*, (if you actually behave as true believers). And to be a *mo'minin* (true believer) does not merely mean offering prayers five times a day, fasting in the month of Ramadan and frequent visits to Makkah for *'umrah* and *Hajj*. Yes, these are obligations and constitute mighty pillars of strength for believers: but *ṣalāh* must prompt Muslims to fight evil and become rightful representatives of Islam. *Ṣawm* should inculcate the true and dynamic spirit of *taqwā*, which implies God-consciousness, heedfulness towards Allah, self-discipline and commitment to a life dedicated to the fulfilment of Islamic ideals. *Zakāh* is a great *'ibādah*, but *zakāh* also offers a vision of a sharing society where wealth ensures the well-being of all and mobilization of the resources of the *Ummah* for the welfare of humanity. *Hajj* is a symbol of unity for Muslims. Despite millions coming for *hajj* from every part of the world, where is that unity that can harness all our energies in the direction of doing what is right and eschewing what is wrong, and conducting the affairs of human society with justice?

Globalization can be a historic opportunity, provided believers can fulfil the *Qur'ānic* condition *in kuntum mo'minin*. If Muslims sincerely, seriously and courageously strive in His path, His help and guidance is assured: 'And those who strive in our cause – We will certainly guide them to Our path. For verily Allah is with those who do right' (*Qur'an*, 29:69).

Islam calls Muslims to a mission, an approach and an effort rooted in this framework and geared to these ideals. If Muslims are prepared to put their whole energies into this, the present is struggle, and the future is for Islam. But this calls for clear commitment and serious efforts in the right direction. May I conclude by suggesting that a strategy to face this challenge would consist of at least the following five elements.

First, there must be a clear vision of Islam's objectives, its moral and civilizational identity and its mission as *Ummah*. Second, we

must make serious efforts towards reforming and reconstructing our own lives and societies in accordance with the values and principles of Islam. This must be done with complete loyalty to Allah and His Prophet (peace be upon him), sincere adherence to the divine revelation as contained in the *Qur'ān* and the *Sunnah*, ensuring freedom and opportunity are granted to all members of the society, as Islam wants us to run our affairs with *shūrā*, supremacy of law, pursuit of justice and respect for the rights of Allah and of the people.

Third, Muslims must realize that systematic preparation to face the challenge is as much a part of an Islamic strategy as unwavering confidence in this mission and responsibility. Knowledge, character, moral sublimity, economic strength, political power, military capability, technological prowess and social cohesion are key planks of this preparation. If Muslims do not set their own house in order and mobilize all their resources to prepare to play their rightful role in the world, nothing can be achieved.

Fourth, Muslims have no option but to aspire to greater cooperation, unity and collective self-reliance on the part of the *Ummah*. Regional groupings, trade and financial arrangements, educational and technological alliances and political coordination are stepping-stones to a global order that is more balanced and just, and that represents a fair state of equilibrium between different nations, socio-political systems and civilizations. Muslim unity could be an effective guarantee against decimation of Muslim countries and the eclipse of their cultural identity in the face of the onslaught of unmanaged globalization. Muslims should not be merely at the receiving end; they must plan and prepare themselves to play a positive role both to protect their identity and interests, and make the world a better place for all.

Finally, Muslims must realize that emotional outbursts and thoughtless confrontation provide no answer to the multidimensional challenges which the *Ummah* faces. In fact, as an *Ummah* with a mission, the right course of action is dialogue, contact, participation and cooperation at the global level. This must be an essential plank of the strategy. The Muslim world's response to the global challenges must be positive. That is the only way not merely to survive but also make a real mark on history.
