

## Preface

# ISLAM AND THE NEW WORLD ORDER

For over a billion Muslims all over the world the new world order is dead even before it was born.

Twentieth century has witnessed many a people talking of a new world order. After the First World War, the American President Woodrow Wilson tried to breath some fresh air into the debate on the future world order and came out with the dream of a world ruled by principles and universally accepted values. His dream was shattered with the flawed birth and quick demise of the League of Nations. The world could neither be saved from a new war nor made safe for democracy. Instead, humankind was confronted with totalitarianisms of the right and the left.

At the end of the Second World War, new hopes were nurtured once again. The United Nations was founded and prospects of a new era were trumpeted. Very soon, these hopes were shattered as well, and humans entered into an era of a disastrous cold war, stretched over four

decades.

Lately, there is a fresh upsurge in the search for a new world order. With the supposed end of the cold war, the U.S. president George Bush came out in early 1990 with a fresh call for a new order. Iraq's disastrous attack on Kuwait and the U.S.-led Gulf war were used as the harbinger of the alleged new order. It was claimed that "no aggressor would in the future be allowed to go unpunished," that "occupation by force would not be tolerated," that "international boundaries would not be allowed to be changed arbitrarily," that "human rights would have to be respected by all," that "it would be ensured that any violation of human rights is brought to an end" without the constraint of national boundaries, and that "the United Nations would play a new role as the peace-keeper of the world." With the establishment of these principles, it was suggested, humanity is bound to enter into a new era of cooperation and security.

Certainly, this is the best that humanity could have aspired for. But one may ask: Are those who wield power in the world today serious about these principles, or are they only interested in using these slogans to advance their own vested interests?

### **The Muslim World: yesterday and today**

Muslims constitute over one fifth of humanity today. There are about 1.2 billion Muslims all over the world. There are some 53 independent Muslim states with over 800 million Muslims living in these countries. These Muslim states occupy around 23 percent of the land area

of the world. Majority of them are found in Asia and Africa, although in Europe, Albania has 73 percent Muslim majority and Bosnia-Herzegovina has also a significant Muslim dimension. There is also strong Muslim presence in other parts of the world, particularly in Europe and America where Islam today is the second largest religion, after Christianity of course.

Yet Islam remains the most misunderstood religion in the West — a religion that stands for peace and justice has been misrepresented as a religion of war and fanaticism. For over a thousand years not only the Muslims had been a dominant power in the world, the Islamic civilization provided peace and security to all its citizens, including non-Muslims. In fact, it was the Muslim World that became the abode for all those who were persecuted in different parts of the world, particularly in Europe.

In his monumental work, the *Making of Humanity*, Robert Briffault examines the record of the Muslim state and society:

Theocracy in the East has not been intellectually tyrannical or coercive. We do not find there the obscurantism, the holding down of thought, the perpetual warfare against intellectual revolt, which is such a familiar feature of the European world, with Greece and Rome at its back (p.113).

Also, historian Muir admits that the Islamic “leniency towards the conquered and their justice and integrity presented a marked contrast to the tyranny and intolerance

of the Romans. ... The Syrian Christians enjoyed more civil and popular liberty under the Arab invaders than they had done under the rule of Heraclius and they had no wish to return to their former state."

*The Caliphate, Its Rise, Decline and Fall*, p.128

This has been the record of the Muslims in history.

The situation has materially changed over the last three centuries when Western colonial powers colonized the Muslim World. During this period, all nations and peoples in the Third World in general and the Muslims in particular have suffered at the hands of the colonial powers in a number of ways. Arnold Toynbee has very rightly summed up the relationship of the world with the West in the following words:

In the encounter between the world and the West that has been going on by now for four or five hundred years, the world, not the West, is the party that, up to now, has had the significant experience. *It has not been the West that has been hit by the world; it is the world that has been hit - and hit hardly by the West.... The West (the world will say) has been the arch-aggressor of modern times. And certainly the world's judgement on the West does seem to be justified over a period of about four and a half centuries ending in 1950.*

*The World and the West* (emphasis added) p.1-4.

Talking of the recent past, Phillip K. Hitti observes:

Unfortunately during the last decade or two, in particular, the impact of the West has not been

all for the good. There is striking contrast between the humanitarian ideas professed by Western missionaries, teachers, and preachers, and the disregard of human values by European and American politicians and warriors; a disparity between word and deed; an overemphasis on economic and nationalistic values. The behaviour of the so-called advanced nations during the last two wars waged on a scale unknown in history; the ability of Western man to let loose these diabolic forces which are the product of his science and his machine and which now threaten the world with destruction; and, with particular relation to the Near East, the handling of the Palestine problem by America, England, France and other nations — all these have worked together to disillusion this man of the Near East who has been trying to establish an intellectual reapproachment with the West. It is these actions of the West which alienate him and shake his belief in the character of the Western man and his morality on both the private and the public levels."

*Islam in the Modern World*, pp. 7-8.

Ironically, this very Muslim World which has suffered at the hands of the West in the past and which remains even today weak materially, economically, technologically and militarily, is now being projected as a threat to the West. Their efforts to rediscover their identity and set their own house in order are looked upon as a challenge to the West. The Frankenstein of "Islamic fundamentalism" is being seen in the innocuous efforts of the Muslims to activate the

democratic process and seek self-reliance. From former presidents Richard Nixon (*Seize the Moment*) and Ronald Reagan (*An American Life*) to intellectuals like Francis Fukuyama (*The End of History and the Last Man*) and columnists like Richard Pfaff and others are playing on the theme of Islam's threat to the West. They all are drum-beating as if a spectre is haunting Europe and America, the spectre of Islamic fundamentalism. This is a phony, one-sided war. Yet the politicians, journalists and media men, even some scholars are party to the projection of this scare-mongering scenario.

Nothing could be farther from the truth. While it is a fact that there is a worldwide Islamic resurgence, Muslims have no aggressive designs against anyone, at home or abroad. They have suffered ideologically, economically, politically, culturally and even morally during the colonial domination. Politically with the independence of Muslim states, they have been able to achieve some mileage. Presently their effort is to seek technology and thus improve their lot so that they could consolidate their lives in the light of their faith, values and history. They do not stand for isolationism or autarky. They want to live in the community of nations with others, but they want to live with respect and honour, not as mere client states but as honourable members of this human family.

### **The bogey of fundamentalism**

Fundamentalism is a distinctly Christian phenomenon. It has no place in the Islamic framework of thought and action. In recent Western history the term has been used for those evangelists in the U.S. who stood for literal

interpretation of the Bible, subscribed to the theory of virgin birth, looked upon Christian ethics not merely as basis for personal conduct but also as a basis for social and collective life. They had also criticized certain aspects of Western life and culture as deviations from Christian ethos. As most of these groups were looked upon by others as extremists and fanatics, the term "fundamentalists" began to be used for them in a pejorative sense.

Any transplantation of this distinctly Christian phenomenon over the Muslims is not only dishonest and incorrect but also politically abhorrent. In Islam there is no difference between life-spiritual and life-material. They represent two sides of the same coin. There is no dichotomy between religion and politics as had been the case in the Christian world. The Qur'an is the Word of Allah (God) and by definition, every Muslim believes in the Book in its entirety. The whole of the Qur'an is fundamental; there is no attempt to pick and choose some and drop others. As such, there is no scope for any fundamentalism in Islam.

If "fundamentalism" is exclusively used for employing violence in religious context, then the whole scenario changes. Unfortunately, violence is a phenomenon which is found in all human societies and in all eras of history. There is nothing peculiar about a religious community. Human failings of men of religion are also human failings and not uniquely related to religion. Secular countries are as much prone to violence and extremism as others. Even after the ascendance of secular culture in the modern West, bloodshed in the name of religion is not non-existent. What is happening in Ireland, Serbia, Bosnia-

Herzegovina, and Croatia today is a proof of the horrors to which man can resort to despite centuries of secularism. Race, colour, language, lifestyle, ideology all have led to their own special brands of violence and fanaticisms. What happened in Los Angeles and a dozen other American cities lately is just one example of what different shapes and forms violence can take. To project certain human failings as "Islamic fundamentalism" can hardly be described as honest or realistic.

### **Islamic resurgence and the new world order**

To understand present-day Muslim mind, it will be useful to reflect upon some of the major features of Islamic resurgence. Muslims are eager to see that a new just world order comes into existence, and not merely a new order which ensures hegemony of one country over others.

Islamic resurgence is unique as well as universal, because in Islam there is unity with diversity, and variation that does not destroy uniqueness. Islam is a universal religion. There is nothing like Arab Islam, Pakistani Islam, Iranian Islam, or Turkish Islam. Within the Islamic universalism, there is unity but not uniformity.

There are certain distinct features which are common everywhere, but they never exhaust the richness of the movement. For example, Arabic is the language of the Qur'an but not necessarily spoken by all Muslims. Although every Muslim learns at least some Arabic, it is not less Islamic to speak other languages and to use them as instruments for developing ideas which conform to



Islamic norms.

Muslims are self-critical, they re-examine the superficial manifestations of social life and go back to the first principles, as expressed in the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet (upon him be peace). This may involve disregarding some of those symbols which have become part of the religious tradition: for example, certain customs or even certain details of jurisprudence. "Going back to the roots" is the spirit behind current resurgence.

This return to the sources acts as a liberating force. Within Islam it initiates an invigorating, dynamic process. Going back to fundamentals does not produce fundamentalism of the kind that leads to retrogressive situations. Rather, brings a freshness of approach, producing a new commitment, a new dynamism, a new flexibility, and a new ability to face challenges.

People are now rediscovering Islam as a source of civilization and culture, a factor which ought to be influencing the shape of society.

In my view, the contemporary phase involves moving away from a slavish imitation of Western models and becoming discriminating in what we use or adapt. In many ways, we can benefit from Western experience, but we do not intend to become instruments for the imposition of alien cultures.

Of course, not all Muslim societies have the same attitude towards Western culture. Those countries which

were sometime back pioneers of Westernization are now in the vanguard of Islamic resurgence. While in the countries which seemed to be lagging behind and were stuck to their traditions are the people who are still enthusiastic about Western prototypes and models.

It is often suggested whether Muslim countries can really afford to reject certain choices in development, technology and so forth, if these would enable them to build communal prosperity and add to the possibilities of human development? This kind of a question epitomizes all the confusion on this issue. Let us set the record straight: we have no problem with development and technology. The real issue is what type of development? Is it going to be mere economic development or total human development — economic, social, moral, ideological — leading to a just social order? Do we visualize development in the context of individual states or do we have a vision of the development of the Islamic ummah? Would this mean going back on recent history, for example, by trying to undo the existence of the Muslim nation-states, or would it mean that the Muslim countries would only concentrate on carving out a new future for the ummah?

In my view, there is no going back in history; in fact, we want to go ahead in a much more creative way than our recent predecessors. We can accept the nation-state as a starting point, although it is not the Muslim ideal. It constitutes the present-day reality, and we do not want to dismantle political systems in an arbitrary manner. We want to bring about a greater sense of unity in the Islamic ummah, greater cooperation and increasing integration

between the different Muslim states. Under Islamic idealism, every nation-state would gradually become an ideological state, and these would go to make up the commonwealth of Islam.

The West has failed to see the strength and potential of the Islamic movement. It has chosen to denigrate it as fundamentalist, fanatic, anti-Western, and anachronistic. It appears that the West is once again committing the fatal mistake of looking upon others belonging to a different paradigm, from the prism of its own distorted categories of thought and history. For sure, this increases the divide between the two people.

Through this ill-advised approach great violence is being done to humanity. It is also bound to misinform the Western people and policy-makers about the true nature of Islamic resurgence, as they are being forced to see them in the light of a particular unhappy chapter of their own history. Being a future-oriented movement, the Islamic movement has nothing in common with the fundamentalist approach of the Christian groups. It has shown great awareness of the problems of modernity and the challenges of technology, and its emphasis on the original sources of Islam, the Qur'an and Sunnah, imparts to its approach a flexibility to innovate which is conspicuous by its absence in the approach of the conservatives who stick to a particular school of fiqh (jurisprudence). All these possibilities are ignored by analysts who try to see the contemporary Islamic world in categories which are not relevant to it.

The present Muslim mind cannot be understood

properly unless we realize that their self-understanding of their predicament is deeper than a mere political anguish. Unfortunately, efforts to understand the Islamic resurgence are often too facile and biased. The theory that the Islamic resurgence is just a result of rapid developmental efforts, particularly in the case of Iran, is at best simplistic. Yes, the development syndrome has its own problems, but it would be an oversimplification to assume that the Muslims' response to forces of resurgence is attributed to tensions created by efforts to achieve quick economic development through technology transfer. Such diagnosis betrays abysmal ignorance of the ethos of the Muslim society.

Similarly, reducing the resurgence to just an angry reaction of people against Western imperialism is equally misleading. That there is a reaction against imperialism is no doubt true. However, more than a political fury, it is a creative urge to be our own-selves. A much deeper cause is dissatisfaction with the ideals and values, the institutions and the system of government imported from the West and imposed upon them. It is a dissatisfaction with their own leadership which they associate with Western interests. It is a multidimensional phenomenon. On the one hand, it is an historical expression of the concerns as well as the aspirations of the people, based primarily upon internal and indigenous factors. On the other hand, it is also a response to an external challenge, the challenge of post-colonial incursions in Muslim society.

Islamic movement is a critique of the Muslim status quo. It is also a critique of the dominant culture of our

times—the Western culture and civilization which are prevalent in many of the Muslim countries. And it is a critique from a different base, from a different point of reference — the Qur'an, and Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (upon him be peace).

Most importantly, it calls for reawakening of faith, a dimension not found in Western writings; they assume that it is just a question of political and social rearrangements. The social order is definitely important but the starting point is reawakening and strengthening of faith, and rebuilding of the individual's moral personality. There is an upsurge of spirituality and idealism, generating a new sense of direction and a commitment to reconstruct their world, whatever be the sacrifice.

The model of leadership during the period of colonial domination and of post-colonial manipulation has been one which just looked after personal interests. That is why Muslim society has become so devoid of moral values and rife with corruption. Exploitation has become a way of life in our part of the world. Muslims have their own weaknesses, and they suffered many reverses as part of the global situation. But the explosion of corruption which is so visible in the present-day Muslim World is a new phenomenon. They relate it to the impact of secularization and Westernization resulting in loss of individual morality and of social ethics, which had historically been based upon tawhid (the unicity of God) and loyalty to the Sunnah of the Prophet (upon him be peace). The secularists in post-colonial Muslim societies tried to superimpose the values of Western liberalism on Muslim peoples which has thrown them into a moral

wilderness, weakening the hold of traditional values over private and public conduct. The zeal to win the rat race and socioeconomic exploitation have become the order of the day, mostly in the name of economic development and material progress. Islamic resurgence represents a rebellion against this state of affairs. It stands for a reaffirmation of Islamic morality and a rededication of the resources of the ummah—material as well as human—to the achievement of social justice and self-reliance. Muslim youth have been inspired by a new vision to rebuild their individual and social life in accordance with the ideals and principles given by Islam and to strive to establish a new social order, not only within their own countries but also to see that a new world order is established ensuring peace, dignity and justice to all the oppressed of the world.

In conclusion, I would suggest that the Islamic resurgence is primarily an internal, indigenous, positive and ideological movement within the Muslim society. It is bound to come into contact, even clash with certain forces in the international arena. The close contact of the West, particularly through colonial rule is relevant, but not the most decisive factor in producing the Islamic response.

So conflict there may be. And to that extent, I would like to invite our Western friends to understand that Muslim criticism of their civilization is not primarily an exercise in political confrontation. The real competition would be at the level of two cultures and civilizations, one based upon Islamic values and the other on the values of materialism, nationalism, and liberalism,

both political and economic. Had Western culture been based on Christianity, on eternal values of morality, on faith, the language and *modus operandi* of the contact and competition would have been different. But that is not the case. The choice is between the Divine Principle and a Secular Materialist Culture. And there is no reason to believe that this competition should be seen by all well-meaning human beings merely in terms of the geopolitic boundaries of the West and the East or even in terms of Christianity versus Islam. In fact, all those human beings anywhere in the world who are concerned over the spiritual and moral crisis of our times should heave a sigh of relief over Islamic resurgence and not be put off or scared by it.

Once the nature of the conflict on the value level and culture is clarified, I would like to underscore that there is a political dimension to the situation that we must not ignore. There is nothing pathologically anti-Western in the Muslim resurgence. It is neither pro nor anti-West on the political relationship between Western countries and the Muslim World, despite the loathsome legacy of colonialism which has the potential to mar these relationships. If China and the United States can have friendly relations without sharing common culture and politico-economic system, why not the West and the Muslim World? Much depends upon how the West looks upon this phenomenon of Islamic resurgence and wants to come to terms with it. If in the Muslim mind, Western powers remain associated with efforts to impose the Western model on Muslim society, keeping Muslims tied to the system of Western domination at national and international levels and thus destabilizing Muslim culture

and society directly or indirectly, then, of course, the tension will increase. Differences are bound to multiply. And if things are not resolved peacefully through dialogue and understanding, through respect for each other's rights and genuine concerns, they are destined to be resolved otherwise. But if, on the other hand, we accept that this is a pluralistic world, that Western culture can coexist with other cultures without expecting to dominate them, that others need not necessarily be looked upon as enemies but as potential friends, then there is a genuine possibility that we can learn to live with our differences. If we follow this approach, we can discover many a common ground. This is the key to the future world order. Are we prepared to accept coexistence, even pro-existence of all cultures, religions and nations? If the answer is yes, the future is bright. The Muslim World wants to strive for a brighter future for humanity. Much will depend on how the West responds to this challenge.

I am sure Dr. S.M. Koreshi's book will be given serious consideration for its insight and threat perception from the West. The West's desire to dictate to others and their lust for others' raw material resources pose a grave peril to human freedom and dignity. By making a sense out of a crude, emerging world order, Koreshi has joined the effort to bring peace and justice to humanity. That he views it from a Muslim perspective is all the more laudable.

Khurshid Ahmad  
Senator