

Islam and the Post-Cold War West: Necessity of an International Solidarity in the Remaking of a New World Order

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One of the objectives of Islamic studies is to research the influence and role of Islam in global politics. Measuring the extent of Islamic influence in foreign policy implementation is as important as identifying religious identities and how those identities are manifested; for instance in acts of terrorism. Islam has been a culture for millions of people for centuries, and Koran does not promote violence or aggressiveness. Similar to other religions, it is unique in essence and inclusive in character. Thus Islam should not be associated with terror, anger, or hatred. Nor should Islamophobia be allowed to become mainstream, a frequent, at times common, phenomenon in the West. The global fight against terrorism should uphold the safety of ordinary Muslims; accordingly, Islamophobia should be prioritized as a global threat. In light of these concerns, this article critically examines the way Islam is dealt with in international politics in the post-Cold War era.

Keywords: Cold War, Islam, Solidarity, World Order, Islamophobia, Muslim



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Introduction

In the post-Cold War era, religion and culture have become key fault lines in international politics, or the new world order as it often called. Dozens of conflicts, human catastrophes and interventions around the world have been explained or politically justified by the perpetrators as part of a tacit cultural war among

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civilizations, implicitly confirming Samuel Huntington's controversial "clash of civilizations" thesis. Huntington presents the post-Cold War period as an era of civilizations fighting over their cultural differences. In this regard, the borders of the Islamic civilization are considered to be the most troublesome, harbingers of potential conflicts between the Islamic world and the Western and Orthodox civilizations¹. Huntington's blueprint of the world order is in fact just one of many theoretical frameworks of the struggle for global dominance through cultural, ideological and other differences. The most common of these depicts Islam as the nemesis of the US in world politics and as an impediment to the world peace. Against this representation of cultures and civilizations, this paper

suggests that contemporary debates on Islam's role and place in formation of the so-called new world order could offer different outlooks, and that Islam's depiction as the post-Cold War nemesis of the US for power and dominance in the international system.

The arch enemy: a requirement for America's global dominance

The liberal world view of the early 1990s anticipated that the world was on the edge of establishing more liberal governments, and that a more peaceful international system was on the horizon. By contrast, realist perspectives continued to define cooperation and peaceful coexistence as periodically challenged by anarchy and conflict. Proving the latter perspective correct, unfortunately, "new wars"², unresolved armed conflicts, and international terror have resulted in the deaths of millions of civilians, regime failures, the proliferation of proxy wars, and greater violence. The

1 S.P.Huntington. The clash of civilizations and the remaking of world order. 1996.

2 "New wars" offer to differentiate traditional wars from the post-cold war period armed conflicts. The differences range from the parties of the modern wars to their character, economy, tactics, methods, etc.

year 2016 was one of the most violent since the end of the Cold War: the Uppsala Conflict Database Program identified 49 armed conflicts in 2016, causing more than 102,000 fatalities. The post-cold war period's internationalized conflicts in Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan had the highest number of casualty levels globally³. It was a requirement of the superpower's (US) character to drag itself into three post-Cold War armed conflicts: as a leading Western ally to counter international terror (Afghanistan); fighting against dictators (Iraq); fighting against radical religious groups (ISIS).

This level of military involvement also entailed the declaration of dominance in the global power system. The collapse of the USSR changed the balance of the global power system, and the US emerged as the only superpower. At the same time, other states have been challenging the new US-led status quo⁴. The rising economy and global interests of China are accompanied by Russia's challenges to the Western world order, while India could become an ally of the two former nations.

Nevertheless, Islam is emerging as an even more serious challenge to the US-led world order⁵; its geography span and the political will of the Muslim countries are key aspects of this rising influence. In a world of shifting geopolitical power centers, from the Atlantic to the Pacific, Islam's role is also growing, positioning it as the archenemy of the United States.

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As part of the positioning of Islam as the nemesis of the US, media outlets and political groups focused on terrorism as a specific tool of Islam: "acts of terrorism and suicide operations have now entered into the Western vocabulary of Muslim actions in the context of war"⁶. The impact of these actions is twofold; on one hand they undermine the true concept of Islam by fuelling Islamophobic attitudes. On the other, they directly play into the hands of militant groups, like ISIS or al Qaida, which use very similar tactics to attract US attention and enlarge their own battlefields in order to gain political and economic dividends. The

3 PRIO. Trends in Armed Conflict, 1946–2016. Conflict Trends. 02/2017.

4 Interests of rising regional powers like China, India, Pakistan and Indonesia will demand acquiring more involvement in decision making on regional affairs.

5 This does not refer only to local populations in the Islamic world, but to all Muslims living across the world.

6 G.Fuller. 2010.P. 320.

al Qaida ‘7-step plan’, the first stage of which was to ‘provoke the US into declaring war on the Islamic world, thereby resulting in the ‘awakening’ of Muslims’ by 2003, was a prime example⁷. In terms of misrepresenting Islam as a threat, for example, the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) report identified political Islam as one of the threats to international security, comparing it to fascism and communism, and underlining ‘political Islam’ as a party to conflicts in Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq⁸. In this regard, Western scholarship, unfortunately, has tended to treat ‘political Islamist’ groups as representative of Muslim peoples, Muslim governments, and Islam itself.

However, this explanation of the post-Cold War world order does not necessarily endorse to Huntington’s clash of civilizations thesis. We rather agree that the “hostility of the West towards Islam does not stem from the clash of civilizations, but from the need of the West to have an indispensable enemy in order to affirm and define its own identity. This explains why, since the collapse of the former Soviet Union, Western strategists have continuously discussed the question of what, after communism, will be the new enemy of the West?”⁹

Islamophobia: a zero sum game

The UK-based Runnymede Trust’s 1997 report ‘Islamophobia: a challenge for us all’ spoke of how Islamophobia, ‘the shorthand way of referring to the dread or hatred of Islam – and, therefore, to fear or dislike all or most Muslims - was necessitated by a new phenomenon that needed naming’¹⁰. The foundation has annually assessed the situation and social conditions of British Muslims since 1991, including the complexities after 9/11. However, in reality, the main targets of Islamophobia are Muslim people living in the West. Therefore, this issue should be addressed throughout the West.

‘Enlarging the landscape’ of Islam is a result of the ‘forced

7 A. Hosken. *Empire of Fear*. Inside the Islamic State. 2016. P. 16

8 PRIO. *Trends in Armed Conflict, 1946–2016*. Conflict Trends. 02/2017.

9 W. Shadid & P.S. van Koningsveld. *The Negative Image of Islam and Muslims in the West: Causes and Solutions. Religious Freedom and the Neutrality of the State: The Position of Islam in the European Union*. Leuven, Peeters, 2002. P180

10 C. Allen. *The ‘first’ decade of Islamophobia: 10 years of the Runnymede Trust report “Islamophobia: a challenge for us all”*. 2007. P 6.

processes'. The movement of Muslim immigrants from the East to the West results from a diverse set of push factors including unemployment, political instability/conflict, human rights issues, economic conditions, etc, not dissimilar to other waves of migration. But the mass migration of Muslims to Europe has also been caused by wars and armed conflicts. The US military intervention in Iraq, civil war in Syria, and the international military campaign against ISIS in the Middle East have created a huge number of new migrants (refugees) to Europe – the safest region in the neighborhood. Europe's appeal also derives from its political and economic stability. The fact that Western countries have undertaken 'a global mission' of protecting universal values, and are the leaders in the international war against terrorism has rebranded Europe as a protector, and makes it even more attractive for refugees.

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Nevertheless, similar to any other minority groups, Muslim communities compose an integrative part of the host nations, and must be treated equally. The changing attitude towards immigrants endangers the situation in any country, as seen in terror attacks committed by Muslims in Europe. Fuller notes that major attacks (Dutch writer killing, Holland, 2004; London underground attacks, 2005; France riots, 2007) were committed by European Muslims¹¹, citizens of European nations. Fuller questions whether there is something "different" about Islam that puts Muslim immigrants into a special category¹². Based on this phrasing and way of thinking, Muslim immigrants are vulnerable; there are sometimes deliberate associations with violence and terror. Muslims usually come from war-torn regions - wars in which the West is involved, and it is "easier" to develop a negative stereotype, as if they carry all the burdens and problems of conflict with them, and may endanger the recipient societies. This perception contributes to negative stereotyping, and potentially hostile attitudes towards Muslims.

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According to a 2008 Gallup survey conducted in Muslim majority countries such as Indonesia, Bangladesh, Mali,

11 G. Fuller. 2010. P 215-216

12 G. Fuller. 2010. P 216

Mauritania, one in four believed that Muslims living in US, France, Britain, and China were not treated fairly¹³. Two years later, another survey looked at treatment of members of different religions treated Muslims in the US. The 2010 report found that ‘about half of Americans from major religious groups believed that the most Americans were prejudiced towards Muslim Americans (especially 66% of Jewish Americans and 60% of Muslim Americans said so)’ and 48% of surveyed ‘American

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Muslims personally had experienced racial and religious discrimination’ in 2009¹⁴.

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In such societies, the fear, hatred, and hostility toward Islam and Muslims that is perpetuated by negative stereotypes results in bias, discrimination, marginalization, and the exclusion of Muslims from social, political, and civic life¹⁵. Tariq Ramadan, a leading European Muslim, warns against the ‘easy pitfall of Islamizing problems that is, identifying problems of Muslim community as somehow linked to Islam’¹⁶.

Islamophobia, like any other type of discrimination, will not bring victory to any of the sides. It constitutes a human rights violation, and can never be beneficial to any society or community; it breaches the very basic rights by enabling discrimination based on race, belief, and ethnic identity. The Organization of Islamic Cooperation’s Plan of Action for 2025 stipulates that ‘the rise of Islamophobia has subjected Muslims to racial profiling and discrimination, negative stereotyping and stigmatization. As a result, Muslims, both indigenous and immigrants have developed feelings of

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13 GALLUP. Islamophobia: understanding anti-Muslim sentiment in the west. <http://news.gallup.com/poll/islamophobia-understanding-anti-muslim-sentiment-west.aspx>

14 GALLUP. <http://news.gallup.com/poll/islamophobia-understanding-anti-muslim-sentiment-west.aspx>

15 GALLUP. Islamophobia: understanding anti-Muslim sentiment in the west. <http://news.gallup.com/poll/islamophobia-understanding-anti-muslim-sentiment-west.aspx>

16 G. Fuller. 2010. P. 217

insecurity in their daily lives and face denial of their basic human rights'¹⁷.

Islamophobia seriously damages social integration processes. Common systems of values and identities may fail, threatening the integrity of nation-states. It goes beyond Islam, and Muslims, affecting the interests and lives of non-Muslims too. Pressure on identities may lead to politicization of immigrants for 'stricter policies to ensure their safety', which might endanger the stability within the society. On the other hand, Islamophobia also becomes an easy tool in serving the interests of terrorists too. Islamophobic attitudes represent a clash of values, such as between liberal and Islamic values. Like other zero-sum game models, Islamophobia does not (cannot) guarantee victory to any party. Islamophobia endangers the true concept of Islam and its values. It also undermines basic liberal values.

Hence, Islamophobia is a complex issue, and should be addressed through cooperation on local (intra-state), bilateral (interstate), and global levels. Organizations like the Islamic Organization for Cooperation and the UN Alliance of Civilizations have been raising concerns about Islamophobia, but international pressure to prevent Islamophobia need to be coordinated; the problem needs to be internationalized.

In looking at the role of Islam in the new world order, one may conclude that attempts to reduce Islam to a political radical ideology, and endeavors to reframe a billion and a half Muslim as terrorists, serves the political and military actions in Middle East and the new proxy wars, where superpowers can demonstrate their global dominance. This reframing is driven by the need for an enemy against whom other parties can unite.

Nevertheless, combating Islamophobia is not the job of one or two states. It requires coordinated actions, both locally and internationally. It requires Islamic solidarity, which should not be limited to Muslim nations. The idea behind Islamic solidarity should be to preserve and promote real Islamic values- most importantly, peace and equality. Islamic solidarity will improve integration

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17 OIC/SUM-13/2016/POA-Final. The OIC - 2025 PROGRAMME OF ACTION. Article 17.P 6.

and cooperation. Moreover, a multi-party approach is required, bringing together Muslims and non-Muslims to combat these challenges. Western Muslims need to ensure they integrate into the local societies, including participation in political, social and cultural processes. Concomitantly, we need to ensure that European nations continue their initiatives to promote local Muslim groups through encouraging their political integration. In general, the role of Western nations in combating Islamophobia cannot be underestimated. International cooperation should be mobilized to fight this negative phenomenon.

Conclusion

This paper first of all examined the remaking of the post-Cold War world order and the role of Islam. The end of the Cold War ensured a shift in global power politics by changing the structure of the international system. With the collapse of the Eastern bloc, the United States found itself in a unique leading position within a community of rising nations, such as China, Russia, and India. Yet, the US has chosen to depict Islam as a threat to global order as a way in which to bolster its own foreign policy priorities, with terrible consequences. This has served the goals of radical religious groups and helped them to mobilize. Secondly, the paper examined how this process has nurtured Islamophobia, enabling it to become a mainstream attitude. There are millions of Muslims around the world who do not promote violence or aggressiveness; as a creed Islam should not be associated with terror, anger, and hatred. Islamophobic attitudes must not become a mainstream attitude.

The paper suggests that the global fight against terrorism should take responsibility for the well being of ordinary Muslims. Islamophobia should be treated as a global threat and accorded international significance. Moreover, international cooperation is needed, going beyond Islamic solidarity and involving both Muslim and Western nations. Ultimately, the concept of Islamic solidarity is not a relational system composed exclusively of Muslim nations, but rather an act of international solidarity to protect and preserve Islamic as well as universal values as a foundation for better cooperation and further development.