

Muslim Union – Need of the Hour

Dr. Iqbal Hussain*

Abstract

In the present era while Muslims constitute more than a quarter of humanity, collectively there is no single body, institution, or voice that can represent the Muslims in international decision making effectively. In the current climate of Islamophobia, extremism, terrorism and instability, many Muslim countries are effectively voiceless and powerless on the world stage. In current era, there is no other institution except Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) which by and large has been unsuccessful to resolve the issues concerning Muslims communities. The Muslim world is undergoing unprecedented changes and challenges both internally and externally and has lost its grip on how to cope with these threats. In such an environment we suggest the formation of a Muslim Union based on democratic principles. This essay puts the situation into contemporary perspective and suggests that the Muslim world needs to seize the initiative from the elitists on all sides and set its own path towards recovery from the present multifaceted challenges. It strongly supports the notion that good governance has to keep the welfare of the masses, and socio-economic justice as the cornerstones.

Key Words

Muslim Union, Unity, Reforms, Muslim Voice, Islamic Civilisation, Socio-economic Justice, Good Governance, Democracy

The Missing Link

O moon, rise and illuminate with your radiance, engaged in your remembrance are stars Hoo

The traders of rubies are modestly roaming the alleys thus far Hoo

* President MUSLIM Institute – UK Chapter, United Kingdom

God forbid when for wayfarers heavy becomes blade of grass Hoo

Don't make us fly with hand clapping 'Bahoo' we are about to fly
across Hoo

(Bahoo, 2010)

We are in the twenty first century and everywhere we are surrounded by images of Muslims and Islam more often than not portrayed in a negative way. This begs the questions such as who speaks for Islam? Who should represent the Muslims' perspective, voice and stance on what is happening around? Who should represent, participate and be involved on behalf of the Muslims?

In the absence of a central authority or a voice representing the collective Muslim view the *Ummah* has seen killing, death, and destruction on a vast scale in Muslim Lands (Civilian Casualties, n.d.; More than 191,000 people killed, 2014; Rasmussen, 2016). Demonization of Muslims and Islam has been observed with labels them such as terrorists, fundamentalists and extremists. Never in the history of mankind have the actions of the few been associated with one quarter of the earth's population. Islamophobia is on rise in the non-Muslim world (Saeed, 2016). The Muslim world has seen desecration of all that is sacred in Islam. In this essay I propose that the way forward for the Muslim world is to form an 'Muslim Union' of Muslim majority countries rather like the European Union. This should be based on engagement, participation and involvement of the masses in truly representative forms of governments within the constituent countries of the Union. The rule of law, accountability, justice and good governance should be the foundations for each member of the Union.

Unity of the Muslim Ummah has been a vital feature of Muslim history starting from the Madni state established at the time of Prophet Muhammed (PBUH). Abu Bakr (ra) became the first Caliph of Islam in 632 AD after the passing away of the Prophet (PBUH) from this mortal sphere. Thus began the period of the Rightly Guided Caliphs which lasted twenty-nine years. Subsequently Khilafah was succeeded by the Umayyeds (661-750 AD) with Damascus as the capital. There then followed the Abbasid Khilafah with its capital in Baghdad for the next five centuries (750-1258 AD). Finally the Ottoman Empire with its

capital at Istanbul lasted for almost six centuries (1350-1918 AD). After the First World War (1914 to 1918) the institution of Khilafah was abolished by Kemal Ata Turk on March 3, 1924. Thus we can see that a Central Authority in the form of Khilafah has been the reality for the vast period of Muslim history. Indeed in this context the period without Central Authority in the form of Khilafah has been an aberration, an anomaly rather than the norm.

In the present era where nation states are very much a reality, the best way forward is to form a Union of Muslim majority countries - The Muslim Union, that can speak for Islam and Muslims.

The Historical Context From Within

The 20th century was a time of great upheaval and unprecedented change in the Muslim world and the present century is accelerating this pace exponentially. The phases of government in the historical struggle for control of one's own destiny (rather than being at the mercy of others) include the following. A great part of Muslim world was under colonial rule in the twentieth century. The colonial powers gained full or partial political control over the countries and established their own administrative structures. This was mostly a master servant relationship because of the rule by foreigners. Some of the strategies employed included occupying the subjugated lands with settler communities. Other tactics included economic exploitation for example the natural resources of oil, mineral wealth and other products as well as cheap labour (Drayton, 2005). In order to strengthen their grip on the populace they encouraged favouritism effectively buying loyalties of selected individuals who were then delegated the task of administering over their patch often ruthlessly and to their own personal advantage and gain rather than to the welfare of the impoverished masses (Said, 1994).

History witnesses some works such as improving the transport systems by building roads and railways which may be directed towards strengthening the colonial rule itself. Colonialists also improved the irrigation systems by establishing systems of canals and waterways. Education system based on European models were developed. Administrative structures were created and the legal system based on the

imported models were implemented. Between 1886 and 1941 the Samaj founded more than 179 schools and colleges, generally called Dayanand Anglo-Vedic (DAV) institutions, in north India and Burma (Asad, 1993; Langohr, n.d.; Zaman, 1999).

From the master and servant system, employed by imperialists, and a system based on patronage along came the tool of nationalism for liberation of the homelands by the native. Along came the rallying cry of nationalism which advocated political independence for a particular land. The native was in essence declaring “I am the master of my fate, I am the captain of my soul” (Henley, n.d.). The aim was to throw away the shackles of servitude and allegiance to a foreign power and to establish self-determination and lay down foundations for own control over own resources and eliminate foreign exploitation altogether. The objective was to carve out a future based on own values, beliefs and practices and in the best interests of the natives rather those of a foreign imperial power. However the elite educated class, using the language of their masters, advocated concepts of liberty for all natives. Native people demanded freedom from subservience and servitude and complete independence from foreign rule. Nothing less than liberation of the motherland and home rule will do. To this end they used the tools to establish the political parties. The modern means of communication via print media and radio became great mobilisers of the masses to the cause.

To this end along came the visionaries such as Dr. Allama Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938) who had great insight and foresight of the future of the Muslims in general and the Muslims of the Indo-Pak sub-Continent in particular, and for the latter, postulated a land for the Muslims in the North West of what was then India under British Raj. Along came exemplary leaders such as Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah (1876-1948) who believed in the rule of law and carved out the state of Pakistan in an exemplary legal manner. People were dedicated to the cause of the masses whom they represented. People followed them regardless of personal consequences even to the point of sacrificing their lives for the greater cause. Many other nations across the world also raised the banner of nationalism and liberated their lands from imperialist powers.

This awakening was happening in the backdrop of the first and the second World Wars. The second World War in particular caused devastation in Europe and the loss of life and property meant a great deal was needed to be done at home. Thus the ability and the will of the imperial powers to keep distant lands under occupation was subdued. Simultaneously the will and determination of the natives of the colonies was at peak demanding independence. The greater will of the natives prevailed over the faltering will of the imperial rulers and this set in motion the chain reaction of independence of many lands in Middle East, Africa and Asia in particular.

The dream of freedom from foreign rule was about to be realised. However the goals of independence were far from being realised. At the time, in most of the countries, foreign imperial rulers were simply being replaced by home feudal or authoritative rulers. The espoused aims and objectives of these freedom movements in many cases would remain just as elusive under home rule as under imperial rule as proved by subsequent events. As a consequence, in the past century, many Muslim majority countries have been ruled by authoritarian regimes and by force rather than by participation of the masses in freely electing representative governments. Winds of change blowing in the form of Arab Spring have been observed in Middle East and North Africa. Those who reform and rule with the consent of the populace may survive but others may end up in the proverbial dustbin of history sooner or later.

Generally the underlying system was not changed. In some cases the reality under new rulers changed from a dream to a perpetual nightmare very quickly. The new rulers instead of being the servant leaders adopted different strategies to dominate and dictate to the masses. They became hereditary rulers or they established dynastic rules ensuring their progeny will continue to live elitist privileged lifestyle at the expense of the impoverished, destitute, hungry, unemployed, uneducated and disease ridden masses. They became the antithesis of what the struggles for freedom and self-determination were all about. The maxim holds true that "Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely" (Acton, 1887). Nepotism, corruption, feudalism, favouritism, hereditary peerage and such practices became the norm. This has had serious

consequences. The occasional volcanic eruptions of public anger and frustration are becoming all too frequent as the conditions of the impoverished ignored masses accelerate from bad to worse and their very survival is threatened.

The sum total is that the pent up resentment and frustration of the masses will lead to despair and fury sooner or later. There will certainly be storms brewing, and volcanoes erupting, which will not be controlled and the progress towards prosperity and advancement will remain sluggish. The time to reform is today. Tomorrow will be too late. Not to reform is to be on the wrong side of history and risks the elites either ending up in the dustbin of history or being turned into dust prematurely or both.

In the twentieth century life in most Muslim countries was predominantly traditional lifestyle. Most people lived in rural communities. The communications were limited, and so was transportation to some extent. With the advent of radio and especially television people could see how the world really was and how other people lived in other parts of the world (Lapidus, 2002). This brought stark comparisons with their own conditions into sharp contrast. This effect was magnified exponentially with the introduction of satellite channels. The reality thus became even more clearer and the contrast more vivid. The internet and social media have blown the lid off all pretence propaganda or “pulling the wool” over the eyes of the masses by the elites everywhere. The proverbial “cat is out of the bag” so to speak and the masses now know that the “emperors have no clothes on” and haven’t got a leg to stand on and rule over them without their consent. The twenty first century may prove to be a century of people power despite the elites desperate attempts to cling onto their privileged, hedonistic, luxurious lifestyles at the expense of the impoverished masses. The internet has done to the electronic media what the Guttenberg printing press did to the printing of books. A better informed populace can form better judgement and hence better decisions and take better actions to improve their own lot and not be at the mercy of some state propaganda.

The Recent Historical Context

With the fall of the Soviet Union and the end of Cold War the expectation was for humanity to be ushered into a period of peace and prosperity for mankind as the clash between Communism and Capitalism was effectively over at least in the international political paradigm (Nye, 2002). In the coming decades, world faced same turmoil even far worse than during the Cold War era. It seems that in some sections of humanity the psyche cannot have a self-identity without having an enemy real or imagined to overcome, subdue or destroy. In other words the self-identity is deeply subjective and always in fear of the “other” (Mountz, 2009). Thus if there is no enemy whether real or imagined self-identity goes into crisis. In order to avoid this doubt of one’s own identity and purpose of life, and to avoid painful introspection one invents new enemies or re-invents old ones in new guise. This shows the weakness of one’s belief system in constantly having an enemy to reinforce one’s own identity. Simply put the fair faulty thinking goes like this. “I live to overcome you. If you don’t exist my life has no meaning. If my life has no meaning then I go into critical mode and implode. In order to preserve myself I declare you my enemy. Whether you are my enemy or no, I don’t care. I am not after the truth. I am only interested in my own self-preservation.”

Due to such faulty thinking described above a new enemy had to be found to replace the old one. If there was no real enemy then a new one had to be imagined or an old one resurrected. Along came Samuel Huntington’s Clash of Civilisations theory (1993) and it was instrumental in throwing the world onto the present trajectory. A trajectory of perpetual wars, strife, and suffering imposed on a largely, impoverished, helpless, weak, Muslim populace of third world countries. No other Civilisation has suffered more from the bitter fruits of Huntington’s labour as Islamic Civilisation. If Islam had ‘bloody borders’ before, then Huntington (1996) facilitated taking the next step in leading to rivers of Muslim blood in Muslim lands.

There is another issue that will of people is not represented in the present prevalent system of governance in many Muslim countries. By and large there is lack of representative government. A stark contrast exists between the “haves” and the “have nots”. There is little or no

accountability and in these circumstances excesses of all sorts are committed because the perpetrators know they can get away with it. This state of affairs is unsustainable for healthy growth of a societies and nations. Granted, this is not the case in all of the Muslim countries and the progressive countries can come together to eradicate such ills from other countries.

We discuss following couple of points which are more relevant in this perspective.

1 - Refugees

The greatest number of refugees in the world are Muslims including the Palestinian and Rohingyas. These are people whose lives have been shattered by the spectre of war or other conflicts requiring migration to neighbouring countries to save their lives. To settle in the new country is one challenge and the miseries attached to this great human crisis are leaving one's home, neighbours, friends, and sometimes even the loved ones, not to mention the belongings and flee for safety, flee for dear life, flee for mere survival.

The top two countries are Afghanistan and Iraq the ones affected directly by "Global War On Terror". Nearly 2.7 (as per UNHCR 2.6) million Afghans are living as refugees since the war began there more than a decade ago. This war has lasted longer than combined duration of First and Second World Wars (Solutions Strategy, n.d.). Nearly 1.5 million Iraqis are living as refugees in other countries since the war was launched there (UNHCR country operations profile - Iraq., n.d.). Somalia is another country affected by this turmoil and according to UNHCR (n.d.), more than a million Somalians have sought refuge in other countries due to the conflict. Sudan (UNHCR South Sudan, n.d.) and Myanmar's Rohingyas (Rohingya people, 2015) account for hundreds of thousands of Muslim refugees.

Millions of Muslims have been affected by war directly or indirectly and have had to flee for their safety. In most of the cases Muslims are the victims of war. Yet paradoxically, in the media, the Muslims are

portrayed as terrorists - as perpetrators of injustice instead of being recognised as the victims of wars and terrorism of one or another kind.

2 - Victims of Terrorism

The vast majority of victims of terrorism are the Muslims suffered 82-97% of terrorism related fatalities over the past 5 years according to the 2011 National Counter Terrorism Centre report. Afghanistan, Iraq and Pakistan are particularly worse hit by this menace. Somalia and Nigeria are also affected.

Some Muslim countries have suffered the double misfortune on the one hand facing huge casualties on the ground as victims of terrorism and violence from within, while on the other hand also having had to bear invasions, wars, drone attacks, cluster bombings, occupations, detentions without charge and indiscriminate shooting of huge numbers of innocent men women and children.

The Challenges of Muslim World

There are many challenges the Muslim world faces on the road to reaching its destination. There are many internal challenges as well as external ones. First is the need to identify the nature of these challenges. There is the need to prioritise the critical ones which will have the greatest impact in improving daily lives. There is also the need to look at the challenges which are urgent and require immediate attention. These crises need to be faced immediately by their very nature.

It is all too easy to blame others for the *Ummah's* circumstances and try to abdicate own responsibilities. This is the path to ruin. First of all the Muslim world needs to challenge this mind-set and overcome its faulty thinking and the resultant myopic approach. This introspection is vital and the process will be painful for the norm that is prevalent presently; but then birth or rebirth is always a painful process. It is however vital to create a new future, a new reality, to create and own a brave new world. Remember the saying that where there is a will there is a way.

Internal Challenges

An important challenge for Muslims, is that they have an identity crisis in the present era. Faced with the tremendous changes that the world has undergone in the last century they have lost the plot, so to speak. So many changes have taken place and with current speed that Muslim world has, cannot keep pace with them. Muslims are facing formidable physical challenges (wars, terrorism, hunger, sickness) tremendous psychological challenges (refugees, homeless, PTSD). In addition unprecedented social challenges (corruption, klashnikof culture, drug culture, crime, and extortion) and lethal political challenges, nepotism, lack of good governance, lack of justice is also there. The world is changing so quickly that the Muslim world has lost its bearings and is out of balance. This balance and equilibrium needs to be restored.

There are many factors to consider. There is an exodus from the villages to urban area (Groth & Sousa-Poza, 2012). The family support and community support is on retreat. Individuals are becoming more important in themselves. Internet with social media (such as Facebook and Twitter) and modern means of communications have made the world a truly global village. So where do Muslims take their values beliefs and practices from? Who are they? What do they stand for? What is acceptable and what is not? These are all pertinent questions relating to one's fundamental concept of identity.

To make matters worse at the time of greatest upheaval in the Muslim world there is no single authority, body, or institution, which can take on the task of looking at the challenges faced and analyse in a scientific, methodical, holistic way and according to the Sacred Texts and, or use *ijtihad* to come to a consensus and create guidelines pertinent to everyday faced challenges. There is an urgent and dire need to create such recognised all-inclusive institution(s) which should include those well versed in Sacred Texts as well as experts in the subject matter under review and any other relevant persons.

The strength of any nation lies in having clear prioritised goals to which the people are committed, and towards which resources (manpower, money, time) are directed preferentially to achieve the desired results. Clearly the goals need to be in harmony with the needs of

the time, so that people are willing to even make short term sacrifices to achieve the long term benefits. In other words the goals are congruent with and consistent with the needs of the nation and their values, hopes, and aspirations. The psychological commitment of the nation to desired goals and their perseverance on the tough path ahead proves that the spirit is invincible and achievement of the goals becomes a matter of time only.

In order to achieve worthwhile goals one needs to have a strategy for each goal. The first step should be to minimise the weaknesses and if possible to eliminate them as soon as possible. This could include for example strengthening institutions for good governance, taking steps to curb curtail and eliminate corruption. One can also focus on improving health of the nation, reducing poverty and creating opportunities for economic prosperity of the nation. To create better and equitable distribution of wealth so that the rich poor divide is diminished. To control impact on climate and conserve the environment and ecological balance, to improve the education and reduce ignorance, to improve the social justice system, and to create an environment conducive to peace and curb and eliminate need for war are some of the areas one can focus on. The citizens need to be empowered and involved at various stages to oversee the functions and see that transparent processes are in place and opacity is reduced. Civil society needs to be strengthened.

External Challenges

One of the greatest challenges Muslims face is the deliberately distorted perception of Islam and the Muslims - thus fulfilling the agenda of the warmongers and war profiteers. This serves to perpetuate the Clash of Civilisations and the endless wars of death, destruction, misery, and suffering heaped upon the weak, helpless, and hapless Muslim world at large, that flow from that theory.

There is a well-established pattern for such actions. An initial step is the propaganda war which begins with the demonization of the Muslims and their leaders. This is intended to make the Muslims appear evil and beyond the pale of reason and logic. In this warped version all the evidence to the contrary is brushed aside and dismissed. False

information and baseless lies are mixed into a potion with the deliberate intent of creating an atmosphere conducive to beating the drums of war and marching relentlessly towards vicious, premeditated attacks. These actions which sometimes amount to crimes against humanity and genocide are heaped upon weak helpless peoples despite massive public opposition by people of conscience worldwide.

This process entails not only distorting and degrading the Muslims' actions but also attacking overtly or covertly, the underlying values and belief systems. Thus the sacred in Islam is attacked profanely in one way or another resulting in humiliation of the belief system of a one quarter of humanity on this planet. Clearly these abhorrent attacks on the sacred in Islam is a violation of the rights of Muslims worldwide. As such these vile attacks are totally unacceptable to the Muslims and are a challenge to decent human beings everywhere who want to live in peace and harmony. Muslims have the will and desire to live lives of dignity and honour. When Islam itself is attacked, the warmongers, war-profiteers, and supremacists' grossly deluded perception of reality emerges from their Islamophobic, racist, xenophobic, irrational, and psychopathic hatred and even fear of the "other".

Another factor is the sense of hubris, picking only on the weak and never on anyone remotely able to retaliate effectively. This clearly demonstrates the school bully boy approach.

All this goes towards showing that the "law of jungle "prevails and principle of "might is right" is very much dominant. Ultimately actions based on such premise are doomed to fail as truth emerges and falsehood finds no place to hide. As the saying goes "You can fool all the people some of the time, and some of the people all the time, but you cannot fool all the people all the time."¹

The Future

What kind of future can the Muslim *Ummah* imagine?

Socioeconomic justice with the welfare of the masses should be at the heart of any way forward and the leaders who are freely and fairly

¹ Abraham Lincoln (1809-1865). Sixteenth American President

elected representatives of the people will be the servants of the peoples not their masters and provide good governance to the best of their abilities.

The downtrodden, the marginalised, the weak, the women, the minorities, the disabled should all feel they are not just part of the system but also stakeholders in the system which will be adaptable according to the needs of the times and bearing in mind the Islamic values beliefs and practices. All the stakeholders will feel part of the system and no one should feel left out of it. In addition there can be no racism or caste system or any other method of displaying that one is inherently superior and another is inferior.

Thus there will be no room for autocrats except in process of transition while the real power is transferred to the elected representatives of the people. There will be no one family or one clan rule and certainly no hereditary rulers of any kind. The policy makers will need to work so that there is no nepotism, no favouritism, no personal preferences and self-interests. The system has to be merit based inherently, transparent in implementation and founded on objective criteria. There has to be a system of checks and balances at all levels especially at higher levels, and no one will be above law. The common good of the people has to be the uppermost as opposed to vested self-interests, thus establishing socioeconomic justice.

This may seem like utopia and too idealistic presently. However if the Muslim world is going to strive it should strive to be the best it can be and not settle for mediocrity.

The above points are just to illustrate the idea. The Muslim world can imagine a future with all sorts of possibilities and even the seemingly impossible may become possible at some point.

The Case for ‘Muslim Union’

Presently Muslim world has the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation that represents the member countries and allows dialogue on issues relevant to the Muslim world. While OIC gives the Muslim world a forum or platform to discuss the relevant issues and while acknowledging its positive role and contribution nevertheless OIC has

been ineffective in resolving some of the most pressing issues of the Muslim world as shown by the events of past few decades and the present state of chaos and multiple unfolding crises tearing the Muslim world apart (Mazhar & Goraya, 2016).

It is time for the Muslim world to think of new ways of doing things. One definition of insanity is “to carry on doing the same things and expect a different result”². Thus it will be insane not to rethink of new ways of looking at the vital, critical, and life threatening issues facing the Muslim world. Indeed the Muslim world is facing the severest threat to its very survival since the devastation of Genghis Khan and his barbarian hordes who came out of the steppes of Mongolia and laid waste the then Muslim world including its capital Baghdad in the thirteen century.

It is time to make those decisions which will allow the *Ummah* to heal its wounds and recover from the trauma both the recent and from the distant past. It is time to make those decisions which will allow the *Ummah* to come out of the pit of darkness, the Dark age of Muslims, the Long Lunar Eclipse of the last five centuries into the twenty first century and start afresh to build a brave new world literally and metaphorically. It is time to unite.

Firstly

Disunity of families, tribes, societies, nations or groups of nations and whole civilisations creates weakness. It marks the fall of those entities. It results in loss of everything from prestige, status, world standing, strength, wealth and to eventually also in honour.

Disunity leads to vilification of the values beliefs norms and practices of the subjugated peoples. Psychologically disunity and lawlessness creates the breeding ground for self-centredness, selfishness, and brings out the worse of mankind’s aggression thus creating the mind-set where crimes against humanity and genocides are committed. This is the state where man is truly the fallen one even below the level of animals (who only kill for food).

² “One definition of insanity is ‘to carry on doing the same things and expect a different result’”. Albert Einstein, German theoretical Physicist (1879-1955).

Externally, disunity leads to war between neighbouring countries and animosity towards each other lasting generations. Disunity leads to dismemberment of countries and lands creating newer weaker entities, again often bearing animosity towards each other. Divide and rule become the normal practice of the powers that be.

Internally disunity creates clan divisions, tribal divisions, ethnic divisions, caste divisions, race divisions, religious divisions, sectarian divisions, and regional divisions. It sets the state of lawlessness, where the strong oppress the weak and the law of the jungle is prevalent and this creates the breeding ground for human strife, suffering, blood-letting and eventual implosion where all is lost.

The concept of Muslim unity lies on the idea of universal peace, as Islam ensures the rights of fellow human beings. Unity can alter the course of history in a positive way. It sets future trajectory of a rising entity whether families, tribes, societies, nations or groups of nations and even whole civilisations. Also it creates internal harmony and a spirit of acceptance, tolerance and cooperation. Therefore, it eases suffering, heals wounds, and starts the journey on the path of kindness, compassion, and love for all. In it lies the spirit of looking after each other and in unity the welfare of all is uppermost-looking after the needy, the downtrodden, the orphans, the widows, the weak, the sick, the disabled, the poor, the homeless and indeed the traveller in the land who is treated as an honoured guest.

Thus in unity lies the practical realisation and manifestation of true values of Islam the peaceful path as practiced in the Madni state. However in the current nation state system, what seems more feasible is the formation of an organization which can bring the Muslim countries on one platform to address the challenges.

Secondly

Islam as a faith is a strong unbreakable uniting bond. Islam gives a complete code of life, a complete system with holistic approach to life in this world and the hereafter. It caters for all the needs whether they are physical such as sustenance or psychological such as perseverance to overcome obstacles in time of adversity, emotional as in loving and

caring for families and the wider Muslim *Ummah* or spiritual as in altruism and love of mankind regardless of race creed or colour.

This strong faith is the solid foundation for unity. Muslims have a particular outlook on life which is unique to Islam. Life on this planet is transient and full of trials and tribulations.

Islam is the last of the three Abrahamic faiths; Judaism and Christianity precede Islam. The followers of both Judaism and Christianity are referred to as ‘people of the Book’ in Islam. It is an article of faith for all Muslims to believe in all the Prophets from Adam, Noah, Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, and onto Moses, Aaron, David, and onto Jesus son of Mary amongst the many other Prophets (peace be upon them all) sent for guidance of mankind as mentioned in the four Holy Texts - Torah, The Psalms, The New testament, and the Final Word of God the Quran. The Prophet Muhammed (PBUH) is thus seen as the last of the lineage of Prophets and as such is the Seal of Prophethood meaning he is the final Prophet. Thus contrary to popular misconception the three Abrahamic faiths have much in common. To respect Judaism and Christianity and all the Prophets is incumbent on all the Muslims. Similarly to respect faith and views of any other is also part of Islamic teachings. This commonality and shared heritage is a ground for understanding, tolerance and acceptance of each other between Muslims, Christians, Jews and other religions and is a goldmine for building bridges. However there is no doubt that there are some in all three religions who prefer to preach intolerance hatred and wilful vilification to suit their own myopic, egotistical and sometimes warmongering, and profiteering agendas.

Creating interfaith harmony can lead to ease of much of mankind’s suffering and a spirit of peaceful coexistence and cooperation can go a long way towards setting the trajectory towards a more harmonious peaceful and prosperous future for most if not all of mankind. It is one of basic guiding principles of Quran as, “Allah does not forbid you from those who do not fight you because of religion and do not expel you from your homes - from being righteous toward them and acting justly toward them. Indeed, Allah loves those who act justly.” (AlQuran, 60:8)

Thirdly

Islam is compatible with democracy and open progressive societies where the government is working for the welfare of the all of its people without discrimination. Muslim World has democratic systems of government in some of the largest populated Muslim majority countries. These include Indonesia, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Turkey, Iran, Malaysia etc.

In my opinion these countries should take the lead in forming the core of the Muslim Union as they already have democratic system and institutions. Turkey and Malaysia are both regarded as good role models on how to be progressive and combine modernity and Islam practically as a way of life.

These countries can take the lead in forming the core of Muslim Union and set the standards and criteria for the other countries to join the MU. These pioneers will be creating a new path towards uniting the *Ummah* and guiding the *Ummah* onto a new trajectory towards a better, brighter more peaceful and prosperous future not only for the Muslim World but humanity at large, which in time can lead to a more peaceful harmonious and shared common global future.

The Muslim Union can help to seize the initiative both from the extremists within Islam and also from the enemies of Islam who continue to vilify Islam and portray Muslims as barbaric and backward. The extremists within Islam who are the few give the fodder for the enemies of Islam to use as a tool to degrade, humiliate and disparage the vast majority of peaceful, peace loving, law abiding 1.8 billion Muslims.

The formation of a Muslim Union will be in the best interest of both Muslims and non-Muslims. As the Union takes shape it will strengthen institutions and countries and this will weaken the non-state actors and oblige or encourage them to lay down their arms and join in the peaceful path towards progress.

Muslim Union's inception will encourage and accelerate the pace of reforms within Muslim majority countries. This will in turn pacify the resentment and frustration of the masses who have been ignored for far long and create in them a feeling of being part of the change and part of

the solution. Most importantly this will give an opportunity towards peaceful transitions of power rather than the present scenarios where there are insurgencies, revolutions, and counter revolutions all leading to violence death and destruction and ultimately making the *Ummah* weaker not stronger.

The Muslim Union formation should be inclusive of all Muslims regardless of their sects, race, and country of origin and as such will be able to help to reduce, halt, and ultimately reverse the scourge of sectarianism within Muslim countries. It can produce an environment of understanding, tolerance, and even forbearance and improve the lot of the masses and allow them to live in the true spirit of Islam as brothers and sisters all belonging to the same *Ummah*.

The Muslim Union can build institutions where the learned from the texts of Islam and the scholars who are experts in their respective fields can come together and discuss issues the *Ummah* and humanity at large is facing and produce consensus and help to guide the people in matters over which there is no clear guidance presently. In the field of medicine for example topics such as abortion, euthanasia, assisted reproduction, organ transplantation and stem cell research are some of the areas of where ethical guidance is needed.

Indeed there is a dire need for modern day *Bait al Hikmahs* (Al-Khalili, 2011) where the learned and skilled people from all over the world can come together and in an environment of peace and creativity help to imagine and create many types of brave new futures. The Islamic Civilisation was the leading civilisation for centuries, while the Europeans were in their dark ages. The Islamic civilisation should emerge from the Muslim dark age or the long lunar eclipse of the last five centuries and once more armed with knowledge, skills, wisdom and a spirit of curiosity reminiscent of the Golden Age of Islam (Lyons, 2011) take its rightful place in the present communities of nations and make a positive contribution in the betterment of humanity. The aim is not to recreate the past as the extremists wish to do. The aim is to learn from the past, take Islamic values and beliefs and apply them practically in the present to create a better, brighter, harmonious, and inclusive future for not just the Muslims but the whole of humanity.

This sense of belonging to the *Ummah* when manifest in lives of Muslims will encourage Muslims to pursue new paths of learning, education, training and contributing towards the betterment of the societies they live in.

When the spectre of war no longer haunts the *Ummah* they can truly put their efforts in positive direction and make a real contribution towards the betterment of their own lives, their communities' lives and even the lives of people far away. Islam has been the beacon of human civilisation for a millennium. Muslim Union can give an opportunity for the *Ummah* to rise once again and initially reduce the impact of the present era of Islamic civilisation under threat. Then halt and eventually reverse the downfall of Islamic civilisation. Thus it can lay the foundation for the rise of the *Ummah* once again. The true spirit of Islam has a lot to contribute to humanity including peaceful co-existence, kindness compassion and love of humanity. Muslims have yet to make the contribution in the field of ecology, conservation, and preservation of nature as encouraged by Islam. Family unity and sense of belonging is strength within Islam. Overcoming the dangers of gross materialism, greed and hedonism are also important features of Islam. There are numerous ways Muslims may be able to contribute when given the opportunity.

Admittedly there exist many challenges practically to taking such initiatives but the prospects are bright and sooner or later these will be realised.

The formation of the Muslim Union can be done in stages. The pioneers can enjoy the benefit of setting the standards for other countries to join. In addition each country has its own sphere of influence and can encourage reforms in these countries and facilitate joining the Muslim Union. Thus in due course the pace of joining members can accelerate. The more the number of countries that join the greater will be the attraction for the rest to come on aboard particularly if the benefits seen by the Muslim Union member countries are clear and obvious. This build-up of momentum means the Muslim Union can reach the tipping point very quickly and its completion becomes inevitable and only a matter of time.

Conclusion

We are sitting at a critical juncture in the history and future of the Muslim world. The *Ummah* is facing tremendous multifaceted challenges of the kind never faced before and the pace is only accelerating. The Muslim ship has been hit by the dark storms and is on the rocks. The Muslim world is facing a battle for the very soul of Islam. Muslim civilisation is under threat both from within and without. It is a culmination of the last five centuries of Muslim Dark Ages or “The Long Lunar Eclipse” of the last five centuries.

The society needs to be educated in eliminating ignorance, intolerance, extremism, and bigotry. In order to rise from the depths of degradation the Muslim world needs to get back to the basics. The *Ummah* needs to understand and practice Islamic values. It is time to put aside the petty differences that divide the *Ummah* and recalling the vast shared common heritage of Islam forge ahead to create a common shared peaceful and prosperous future for the betterment of not only the Muslims but the whole of humanity. It is the time for the Muslims to rise to the occasion.

There is the dire need to look at the common good. The welfare of the masses should be a top priority. The Muslim world should be prepared to uplift the down trodden, the weak, the helpless. The Muslim world should create harmonious, caring, kind and compassionate societies, which are tolerant and all inclusive. The Muslim world should lay the foundations towards coming out of the pit of despair it has fallen into, one step at a time. As the Chinese saying goes the journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step. Let the *Ummah* take that first step here and now. Let the *Ummah* create its own desired future here and now.

This is the time to form The Muslim Union! This is *the* challenge of our times! This is *the* need of the hour!

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