

**GLOBAL MEDIA, ISLAMOPHOBIA AND ITS IMPACT ON CONFLICT
RESOLUTION**

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ABSTRACT

From the latter part of the last century to the present context, the world has witnessed the powerful tool of the global media; it has been one of the major sources that questioned and defined cultures, social and political movements and has enabled the world to break through the barriers of differences. Nonetheless, although mass media has particularly played a significant role in the shaping of wars, conflicts and its resolutions, it has also often failed to reflect objectivity. Dominant global media networks have been criticized to have biases towards the political agendas of the “western world” or more specifically, those of first world nations. Examples of Hitler’s Germany can be drawn from history to analyze how the media was utilized as the main tool of their propaganda. Parallel analogies can be made between the blatant manipulation of the media then and that of the media of the present time.

Similar references can be made from the media’s role in post cold war and the rise of a new global threat, that of the Islamic terrorists. Since the aftermath of these attacks and the rise of religious militancy, Islam has been the focus of much scrutiny. This has been further perpetuated by the media’s depiction of Islam as a representation of violence. Although many Muslims have attempted to distinguish themselves from these extremist groups that in reality do not represent the 1.4 billion Muslims dispersed around the world, the majority of Muslims are facing the repercussions and blame of these isolated terrorist acts. Moreover, the continued demonization of Islamic clerics and leaders opposing basic rights are the primary images that are repeatedly portrayed through the media. These are some misconceptions which Muslims are not only subjected to at present, but also serves as negative propaganda upon which history will be recorded.

Therefore, this paper shall attempt to primarily discuss the impact that the global media has had in portraying Islam as a religion of violence. Secondly, it will elaborate on how this has accentuated the rise of Islamophobia, whilst also allowing these terrorist groups to disseminate their message by using religion as a justification. Furthermore, it will discuss the correlation of the global media’s depiction of this new threat in forming the outcomes of wars and conflict resolution. The paper will conclude by proposing a set of policies that will adhere to how the global media can rectify these negative conceptions and channel it to find solutions of peace. In order to prevent these terrorist groups from further succeeding, and to abstain from consequent wars, the paper will use the teachings of the Holy Quran and the examples set by Mohammad (Peace be upon him) to counter these misconceptions about Islam.

THE ROLE OF MASS MEDIA

Marshall McLuhan, often called the media prophet, in his book, *Understanding Media: the Extensions of Man* (1964) coined a phrase – medium is the message- to explain the influence of mass media on the readers and audiences. The modern era is the age of the media. It is an age of communication technology and information revolution. At this stage of development, Mass Media is more pervasive than ever before. The Media has virtually turned the world into a global village of communication.

The traditional role of mass media as defined by the media gurus' are- to inform, educate, entertain, and to persuade the people. The media can bring change in behavior and attitude of the people by emphasizing certain issues.

Meanwhile, with the revolutionary progress of mass communication, an unprecedented opportunity has been created to share and exchange information for knowledge and social change. But, the media has turned the affairs into a war of words. Actually, today's wars in the battle fields are the cumulative actions of what was designed , discussed, and persuaded through the media in molding a favorable public opinion.

The power of media has intimidated men for centuries. Now the power of live-actions video images on television has become even more intimidating. The books, newspapers, magazines, video cartoons, movie, radio, television and internet based websites are now widely used to manipulate the information, facts and believes. The instrument of mass communication in the modern world have an enormous potential for inducing newer images in shaping global politics, culture and the public believes.

Mass media is both a force for integration and for dispersion and individuation in society. Certainly the question of what most wide-ranging consequences follow from the media must also raise the question of motivation and use. With the emergence of modern communication technology, the society as a whole is now a simple hostage at the hands of the media. The time has come to ask whether the people are being managed, manipulated, massaged and brainwashed by the Media. Media men with a biased mind often become propagandists of their personal opinion, using the media as their vehicle. The media is also controlled by their sponsors.

MISREPRESENTATION OF ISLAM

The media has the unique and often grueling responsibility of reporting fair and unbiased news stories. However, the global media are now blamed for overlooking the ethical issues especially when it comes to the question of Islam. It is now clear to the world citizens that the western Media has launched a concerted campaign against Islam in the name of a campaign against terror. To western media experts like Denis McQuail, the more channels carrying the same campaign message, the greater the probability of acceptance by the audience (McQuail, 1994).

Since the end of the Cold War, much media attention has focused on Islam as a disruption in the global order. Although Islam is the fastest growing religion in the West, the West has many stereotypes and misconceptions about Islam that are due to the media, prejudice, and ignorance. Islam is often looked upon as "extremist", "terrorist", or "fundamental" religion. In contrast to what many Westerners think of Islam, Islam is a peaceful religion, which does not promote any forms of uncalled violence or "terrorist" actions.

Stereotypes about Islam are not new to Western culture and can be traced back 1400 years. At the time, Islam and Christianity were involved in the Crusades during the Ottoman and Moorish control in Europe. Islam spread quickly to the West, and threatened the position of the Christian Church and the ruling classes. The Western elites, mainly the governments and the churches, then became highly involved in seeing that negative images were presented about Islam. As a result, not only were battles fought against Islam, but also a war of words was initiated to make sure that Islam would not have any converts or sympathizers in the West.

Today, the West, with limited understanding of Islamic history, has identified a new enemy, "radical Islam", a stereotype common to Western thought, portraying Muslims as fundamentalists or potential terrorists. Some of these ideas that the Western people have developed about Islam are due to the mass media of the West. Reporters who cover the Muslim world have very little details about it and therefore, develop a distorted image of Islam that Western culture adopts

For the media to isolate Islam as a religion that fosters terrorism is biased and just plain irresponsible. In 1995 when Timothy McVeigh committed "the worst terrorist act in American history" by bombing the Oklahoma City federal building and killing 167 people, many of them children, reporters did not sensationalize the story by referring to McVeigh as a "Christian terrorist." Instead after the Oklahoma City bombing, the TWA 800 disaster, and the Olympic bombing, Muslims and Arabs were initially blamed, which resulted in harassment of Arab-Americans and Muslims. After the Oklahoma bombing, this resulted in approximately 220 attacks against Arab-Americans and Muslims. (www.suite1001.com).

Mohammed A. Siddiqi, a professor at Western Illinois University, said the coverage of Islam in major US newspapers contains most upsetting mistakes occur with the indiscriminate use of "fundamentalist" for any dedicated Muslim and the failure to distinguish between cultural practices that are national or regional in origin and not observed by Muslims in other countries. The New York Times was guilty of the latter mistake in a story from France dated January 11, 1993, about a Gambian woman jailed for mutilating the genitals of two baby daughters. The news article said female circumcision was an "age-old Muslim ritual" that "was originally applied in Muslim countries to control women." (<http://www.jannah.org/articles/media.html>).

Two anthropologists at Princeton University, in a published letter to the editor, wrote: "Nothing in the sacred scriptures of Islam justifies this brutal operation, nor do most Muslims practice it. It is found in parts of sub-Saharan Africa where Islam has combined with local custom, as well as in non-Muslim societies elsewhere." Abdellah Hammoudi and Lawrence Rosen, who wrote the letter, complimented a Times column by A. M. Rosenthal which had condemned the practice as mutilation. (<http://www.jannah.org/articles/media/html>).

The arrest of suspects in the New York World Trade Center bombing in 1993 led to exploration in the news media of their possible links to a radical Islamic group. Most national news media made it clear that the New Jersey mosque in question was an atypical Islamic center.

Nevertheless, Yvonne Haddad, a history professor at the University of Massachusetts asked to comment on early press treatment of the story, said in an interview with *USA TODAY*, "The press needs to sell stories, and Islamic terrorism sells. There are some newspapers that

do it more carefully than others, but it keeps being used." (<http://www.jannah.org/articles/media/html>).

A major factor which contributes to Islamic stereotyping in the West is due to the media's selection of their words that describe Muslims. Some common names heard or seen in the news about Muslims are "extremist" or "terrorist". These words are misleading and are mainly anti-Islamic. The media rarely uses more neutral terms such as "revivalist" or "progressives".

A majority of the media's reports that talk about Islamic fundamentalism usually describes most Muslims as extremists. For example, Time magazine published a photograph where Muslims soldiers were shown performing prayers with guns. The caption on the bottom of the picture said, "Guns and prayer go together in the fundamentalist battle". The part that the Magazine omitted or failed to state was that the Muslim soldiers were praying on a battlefield in Afghanistan. Common sense of the situation meant that the soldiers had to remain armed at all times in case of an ambush at any time.

With regard to the soldiers, another great misconception that exists is the truth about Jihad or "holy war" in Islam. Jihad literally means "The struggle in the path of God". However, the Western media often abuses the meaning of jihad by referring to it as a holy war where Muslims unreasonably kill non-believers. But the fact is that, jihad can mean a numbers of things that a Muslim does for the sake of God. Rarely has the Western media used this kind of a definition in their reports. The media often takes the word "jihad" out of context to propagate negative views on Islam.

The association of Islam and violence is a common misconception that the general Western public has developed about Islam. An example of this kind of misconception is that the Western media and some historians often say that Islam was a religion spread by the sword. The spread of Islam was not through coercion but through acceptance of the religion.

Since the majority of the Western public only gets their information about Islam through the media, they develop a misconception. The media's reports about Arab or "Islamic" events, such as the Gulf War, are often misunderstood. The media infrequently distinguishes between the religion Islam and the political affairs that occur in most Islamic countries.

The notion of associating of Islam and Muslims with the terms Arabs and Middle East are in fact misleading. Arabs only account for 18% of the Muslim population across the world. (<http://www.islamfortoday.com>)

In their initial coverage, by emphasizing a build up to military action rather than exploring alternative solutions the western media provided support for, even helped create a context in which, armed intervention in Iraq was both expected and accepted. The globe witnessed a “pre-emptive attack” on Iraq and the emergence of “embedded journalism”.

By defining the solution to the initial attack as a war on terrorism, policymakers provided the moral mandate for legitimated the course of action taken to have conceived of it as a crime would have required a different and that for the USA politically less satisfying approach. The western media, especially the big ones, also promoted the causes of dehumanization representing the tribes of Afghanistan as warring factions of primitive barbarians.

Aside from the fact that the media misrepresents Islam, the media is also a profit-seeking organization. Islam has often been presented as a menace or a threat to the West and although negative images do not correspond to Islam, but are the belief of certain sectors of a particular society it influences people’s views on Islam.

The Western media’s poor representations of Islam are due to poor language translations, the absence of developed news agencies with international networks and native reporters, and biased reporting by reporters.

According to Waseem Sajjad, former Chairman of the Senate of Pakistan the Islamic world is poorly represented in the West in terms of press and media coverage. Not only are there just handfuls of news agencies in Muslim countries; there is the concern over the number of inexperienced reporters. Many reporters don’t understand the local cultures nor speak the language, leaving them with access to only those English or French speaking Westernized elites. Thus their representation is often a biased account of the political and social events from the point of view of the ruling minority in Muslim countries

(<http://www.islamfortoday.com>)

A negative image of Islam is becoming more inherent in the Western culture from inaccurate media coverage. The Western public often is misinformed about Muslims through the images on television, motion picture screens, magazines, radios, and comic strips in newspapers, which promote strong messages among their audiences. Western reporters often say that Muslims are terrorists. This becomes a common image to the general person that all Muslims are terrorists. Edward Said's book, *Covering Islam* (1997), talks about how the media and experts determine how we see the rest of the world. He says that:

Today, Islam is peculiarly traumatic news in the West. During the past few years, especially since events in Iran caught European and American attention so strongly, the media have therefore covered Islam: they have portrayed it, characterized it, analyzed it, given instant courses on it, and consequently they have made it known. But this coverage is misleadingly full, and a great deal in this energetic coverage is based on far from objective material. In many instances Islam has licensed not only patent inaccuracy, but also expressions of unrestrained ethnocentrism, cultural, and even racial hatred, deep yet paradoxically free-floating hostility.

As well as creating inaccurate images about Islam, the Western media usually identifies Islam in Muslim conflicts. The media hardly points other religions out in their conflicts. For example, the news would say, "five Israelis may have been shot, but they were shot by five Muslims", instead of saying "Five Israelis were shot by five Palestinians". The media often reverses this action when a conflict is against Muslims, for example the news would usually say "Bosnians are being killed by Serbians", but instead rarely says, "Muslims are being killed by Christians".

In addition to the media's inaccurate representations about conflicts, human rights of women in Islam, such as women veiling and women's rights. The media often represents Islam as a male dominant religion where Muslim men have complete authority over all groups of people. However, it is ironic of what the media represents, that the Prophet Mohammed (Peace be upon him) was one the greatest reformers for women. In fact, Islam probably is the only religion that formally teaches women's rights and finds ways to protect them and if practiced correctly, it provides an equal gender society.

As Islam came around, traditional pre-Islamic roles of women were replaced by new Islamic roles that women followed. Islam allowed women to have the right to be educated and the right to participate in political, economical, and social activities in their communities. This created upward mobility in their communities. Women were also given the right to vote, something the U.S. denied women until 1919. Women were given the right to inherit property and take charge of their possessions. While most of these rights are denied to Muslim women today as a result of cultural tradition, one should not associate this with Islam, because they do not correlate with it.

Islamic women wearing veils is another commonly misunderstood concept. in the West. It is thought of as a harsh custom that Islam requires of women. Although it is claimed that's veils infringe the rights of women, in fact, it is meant to serve just the opposite and protect them. Islam requires women to wear a veil for their own safety, but if a woman chooses not to wear it, it is her choice and it is between her and her God.

Islamic women are indeed supposed to be granted these rights, but the media often fails to inform its audiences about this fact. The media also fails to report that most of the Islamic countries have a high illiteracy rate. This means that it is "virtually impossible for many Muslim women to challenge cultural male authority when the women themselves do not know the difference between village customs and actual Islamic law". The Western media would be able to better represent women's issues in Islamic countries if they identified how and why governments have limited women's rights that are guaranteed to them by the Holy Quran.

It must be noted that three Islamic countries (Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Turkey) that have had female heads of states. In contrast, most Westerns nations such as the United States have yet to select a female president.

WHY ISLAM IS TARGETED

Islam is a universal belief system which has been presenting itself as a civilization alternative to western secularism. The recent western interest in Islam dates back to the mid-1970s, when the Islamic way of life became the choice of an increasing segment of Muslim society. The rejuvenation of Islamic ideas and practices was felt in all levels of society, including the educated and well-to-do, and took various forms, including intellectual and political.

This development came as a surprise to many western scholars and policy makers, who, a decade earlier, had declared the triumph of western liberalism and the demise of Islam in the Muslim world. Daniel Lerner made, in *The Passing of Traditional Society* (1984), the following assessment of the place of Islam in the Middle Eastern society: whether from East or West, modernization poses the same basic challenge-the infusion of "a rationalist and positivist spirit" against which scholars seem agreed, "Islam is absolutely defenseless."

The phasing and modality of the process have changed, however, in the past decade. Where Europeanization once penetrated only the upper level of Middle East society, affecting mainly leisure-class fashions, modernization today diffuses among a wider population and touches public institutions as well as private aspirations with its disquieting "positivist spirit." By the late 1980s, the western perception of Islam took a drastically different form. With the spread of Islamic re-assertiveness eastward and westward, within and beyond Muslim society- a phenomenon often referred to as Islamic resurgence- many eminent scholars in the West began to view Islam not as a dying creed of purely historical significance, but as a formidable force, potentially threatening to western globalization. In his widely read and highly celebrated book, *The End of History and the Last Man* (2006), Francis Fukuyama had the following to say about Islam:

"It is true that Islam constitutes a systematic and coherent ideology, just like liberalism and communism, with its own code of morality and doctrine of political and social justice. The appeal of Islam is potentially universal, reaching out to all men as men, and not just to members of a particular ethnic or national group. And Islam has indeed defeated liberal democracy in many parts of the Islamic world, posing a grave threat to liberal practices even in countries where it has not achieved political power directly. The end of the cold war in

Europe was followed immediately by a challenge to the West from Iraq, in which Islam was arguably a factor.”

While Fukuyama moves quickly in the next paragraph to dismiss the relevance of Islam on the grounds that it "has virtually no appeal outside those areas that were culturally Islamic to begin with," the fact remains that Islam is perceived by the author to pose a threat to western globalism, as it is capable of providing a "coherent ideology" and is "potentially universal, reaching out to all men as men."

The above sentiments are echoed by Zbigniew Brzezinski, an American statesman and foreign policy strategist. In *Out of Control* (1994), a book published shortly after the demise of the Soviet Union, Brzezinski sounds more alarming as he warns against an Islamic expansion to Central Asia, taking advantage, as he puts it, of the power vacuum created by the collapse of the Soviet empire:

“Since nature abhors vacuum, it is already evident that outside powers, particularly the neighboring Islamic states, are likely to try to fill the geopolitical void created in Central Asia by the collapse of the Russian imperial sway. Turkey, Iran, and Pakistan have already been jockeying in order to extend their influence, while the more distant Saudi Arabia has been financing a major effort to revitalize the region's Moslem cultural and religious heritage. Islam is thus pushing northward, reversing the geopolitical momentum of the last two centuries”.

While Brzezinski does not dismiss the capacity of Islam to effect sociopolitical transformation of global proportions, he rightly points out to the current limitations of contemporary Islamic re-assertiveness, reflected in the absence of a concrete model for translating Islamic ideals into social reality.

WESTERN POLICY OPTION AND ESCALATION OF CONFLICT

Foreign policy deals with “foreign” people, foreign governments and political actors. It implies dealing with other cultures, traditions, religions and values.

Similarly, Western perception of “the other” necessarily is being shaped by their own perception and identity. Feelings of inferiority or superiority, of cultural distinctiveness, or of insecurity do shape the way foreign policy is conducted.

Even after the end of the Cold War, Western foreign policy thinking is still heavily influenced by its former assumptions. Obviously, the Soviet Union today cannot figure as a dangerous threat to the West, since it does not exist any longer. Today, not one overwhelming enemy creates this professed feeling of insecurity, but instability itself, and some minor powers that at best play a third rate role on the global stage. “Rogue” or “outlaw states” now have to pose as enemies, connected to specific topics of concern.

When the Soviet Union was the “Evil Empire”, Islamic forces in Soviet Central Asia and its southern neighbors, notably Afghanistan and Pakistan, were seen by many US policymakers as potentially useful allies against the big communist enemy. This was despite the Western image of Islam as an irrational and unpredictable element in world politics - an image reinforced by the 1970s' oil embargoes and US hostage crisis in Teheran.

Now that the Cold War is of the past, America's foreign policy establishment has begun to perceive Islam as “the new threat”. They are of the opinion that Islamic fundamentalism is an aggressive revolutionary movement as militant and violent as the Bolshevik, Fascist, and Nazi movements of the past. That is why a relevant section of the Western foreign policy community advocated not only a “less friendly stance towards Islam”, but outright confrontation.

Evidently, this overt confrontation represents a reactionary response by powerful groups in the West against an Islamic resurgence that has been deemed threatening to the global order. The attack on Islam and its symbols runs on two fronts:

Monsignor Cesare Mazzolari, the bishop of Rumbek in southern Sudan asserts that "this is just the beginning," of the war on Islam. However, still cautious of facing 1.3 billion united Muslims, like many other Islamophobes, he tries to hide behind Islamism: "The Church has defeated communism, but is just starting to understand its next challenge – Islamism, which is much worse." (<http://www.myiwc.com>).

Generally speaking the “Islamic Threat” in the West does exist merely as a sentiment and as a policy tool. Decision makers sometimes may share a weak version of anti-Muslim ideology, but they are driven by more practical and more specific factors: in Europe by a desire to cut off immigration from Turkey and the Maghreb to protect the labor market in times of high unemployment; by the strategic consideration to control the Gulf area; by enmity towards specific countries or political actors; by an interest to guarantee stability to friendly regimes; and by similar considerations. These practical interests will make it impossible to deal with the Middle East and Islam in a highly ideological fashion. Muslims and their governments very often are strongly in the Western camp.

MASS MEDIA: AN EXTENSION OF WESTERN FOREIGN POLICY

On the mass media front, as western media seem bent to equate the highly tolerant and humane worldview of Islam with religious fanaticism, and to reduce the widely diverse approaches and concerns of Islamic groups into religious violence. What is more disturbing, however, is that while western media strongly condemn what is wrongly portrayed as Islamic imposition and aggression, they justify secular imposition and aggression, ruthlessly practice by security forces of military dictatorships throughout the Muslim world.

The significance of the actions undertaken by media reporters and foreign policy actors lies in the fact that they feed into each other, leading to constant and continuous escalation in the confrontation between Islam and the West. That is, by supporting military dictators in the Muslim world, western policy makers create conditions conducive to political radicalism, as the suppressive measures of the state push certain Islamist groups to violence. On the other hand, by concentrating on radical groups and presenting them as the representatives par excellence of contemporary Islamic resurgence, media reporters reinforce the fears of policy makers and encourage them to stick to their hard line.

In regard to the perception of Islam and the Middle East there is an obvious gap between many of the mass media and the foreign policy elite are thinking. It varies over time and from country to country. For instance in Europe the gap seems to be deeper than in the United States, but it exists everywhere.

The Economist in a 1993 issue wrote, "Like most big social movements, the expanding power of the mosque is a complicated affair. It takes different forms in different countries and its consequences are graver in some places than in others. But the threat is real enough".

The distortion of the image of Islam and Muslims by the global media takes a variety of forms. Occasionally, distortion results from reporters' ignorance of Islam and their tendency to extrapolate from their particular experiences of religion and religious groups in western society to Islam and Muslim groups. Western media reports are rampant with distorted views about Islam. However, a few examples should suffice to demonstrate this point. In a news feature published in its 15 September 1990 issue, under the title "Arab Christians Exodus," *The Economist* endeavored, albeit in a very subtle manner, to link what it referred to as "Christian exodus" to the dominance of Islam in the Arab world.

The opening paragraph put the issue in the following dramatic terms: In fact, Christianity is dying in the land of its birth. Christians are leaving Palestine and Lebanon in such numbers that local churches fear for their future. In all the Arab lands, it seems, only Egypt's Christian community is thriving.

But, rather than attributing the Christian "exodus" to deteriorating economic and security conditions caused by Zionist and Maronite excesses in Palestine and Lebanon respectively, the article points a finger at Islam, citing alleged Muslim "revenge on all Christians" following the defeat of the Crusaders, and alludes to the emigration of many Christians to Europe and the Americas, following the colonial powers' withdrawal from Muslim lands.

The article fails to point out that Christian communities continued to thrive in Muslim societies before, during, and after the Crusades, even after the brutal "ethnic cleansing" of the Muslims of Spain by Christian gothic. Neither does the article state that many of the emigrants who left with the colonial powers were Muslim collaborators who feared retribution for having supported invading forces.

In another article published in June 1995, "Islam's Dark Side", *The Economist* called upon the "international community" to give the Sudanese opposition-most notably the rebels in the south-"whatever help it needs to remove Mr. Turabi." While *The Economist* cites what it refers to as an "economic disaster" in Sudan-of course forgetting that such "disaster" is

created by the western embargo on Sudan-as the reason for its anger with Turabi, it could not hide the fact that the Islamic orientation of the Sudanese government is a major source of its anger, particularly the government's efforts to implement "shari`a law" and its attempt "to export its version of Islam."

In an article published in the *Herald Tribune* in its 6 July 1995 issue, Richard Cohen examined the rising popularity of the Welfare Party in Turkey. In assessing the growth of the Islamic presence there and its implications for the West, Cohen had the following to say:

For the West the stakes here are enormous and the threat of Turkey going the way of Iran has given the country an importance it has not had since the cold war ended. . . Should Turkey become an Islamic republic, no Iranian containment policy could succeed-nor, probably, one directed at Iraq. Turkey would leave NATO, in a sense fleeing Europe for the Middle East. Undoubtedly, it would join the anti-Israeli bloc of Islamic nations. What it would do in Bosnia, and to the sleep of the Greeks, is not hard to guess.

The above words are quite revealing. Although the Welfare Party cannot be accused of militancy or violence, its Islamic orientation is sufficient to make the prospect of an Islamic Republic in Turkey alarming. For, as Cohen put it, in this case Turkey would be "fleeing Europe to the Middle East" and hence cannot be relied upon, as it would be supporting the interests of the Muslim Middle East, rather than those of Western Europe.

The same approach was used by American media after the car bombing of the Federal Building in Oklahoma City in April 1995. On 20 April 1995, the *Seattle Post-Intelligencers* quoted Robert Heibel, former FBI director of counterterrorism, who said: "My feeling is-if it looks like a duck, talks like a duck and walks like a duck, it's probably a duck. ---- bombings are the tool of Islamic fundamentalism." On the next day, The Wall Street Journal published the following statement on Muslim communities in the United States: "Growing Muslim communities in other areas of the US, such as in New York, Detroit and Oklahoma City, also include some extremist members who could provide support for terrorists, analysts say." (<http://www.islamonline.net>)

Another tactic used by the global media is to justify acts of aggression against Muslims. Again, one can find many examples of this kind of tactic in the western press.

In an article published in *Le Monde* on 13 September 1994, which reappeared in English in the *Guardian* on 25 September, Robert Sole defended the move by certain French schools to prevent Muslim girls from wearing a hijab (headscarf). While conceding that Christian and Jewish pupils are not prevented by French schools from wearing religious symbols such as a crucifix and kippas, he took exception with Muslim attire. Wearing hijab, as he saw it, is neither a simple act of displaying religious symbols, nor one that aims at maintaining Muslim modesty, but rather an act that "symbolizes the inequality of the sexes and the confinement of women." And so, rather than attributing repression to schools, which prevent Muslim girls from practicing an important religious duty, repression is strangely attributed to the victims of an act of aggression (<http://www.islamonline.net>).

Another example of justifying aggression against Muslims can be found in a report published in the 26 December 1994 issue of *Newsweek Magazine* under the heading "Retreat." The news report examined the effectiveness of the United Nations mission in Bosnia, and concluded that the mission has been disastrous. However, rather than calling for tougher measures against Serb aggression, the article insisted that sending peacekeeping troops and declaring certain Bosnian cities "safe areas" can only contribute to prolonging the agony of the Bosnian people. As Kenneth Auchincloss, the author of the article, puts it:

And in retrospect, it's not at all clear that anything the Western nations might have done—short of an all out armed intervention that none of them was willing to undertake—would have stopped this war; it springs from ancient hatreds that outsiders can't suppress or assuage. What is clear is that half measures like arms embargoes and so-called "safe areas" have very likely prolonged it. The blue helmets have helped relieve some of the horrors in Sarajevo but their very presence reinforces the stalemate that makes the siege go on—and this is hardly a favor to the beleaguered citizens. What lies at the heart of the miscalculations about Bosnia is a kind of sentimentality to which the West is particularly prone. We rush to make humanitarian gestures without thinking very much about the consequences. When confronted by the spectacle of human suffering, we feel an immediate impulse to try to help. When the suffering occurs in a war zone, the only way to send help is under cover of an armed force. And when an armed force is sent, it inevitably gets drawn into the battle but lacks the strength to stop it.

A similar article published in *Time Magazine* on 26 June 1995 under the title *Why Peacekeeping Doesn't Work* made even a more outrageous suggestion. Henry Grunwald, the author of this article, proposed that a "peacekeeping" force should not be committed to areas such as Bosnia and Somalia, where Muslims are slaughtered, but rather to places where dictators are involved in power struggles with Islamic groups in order to support the former against the later (<http://www.islamonline.net>)

THE IMPACT

Muslims justifiably worry that the terrorist activities of groups which call themselves Muslim have colored public opinion strongly against all followers of Islam. The term "Muslim terrorist" is a non sequitur, they say, because if one is truly a Muslim, he or she can not be a terrorist.

Muslims are now asking, if, as Mr Bush claims, the attacks on New York and Washington were an assault on civilization", why shouldn't Muslims regard an attack on Afghanistan as a war on Islam?

Salam al-Marayati, director of the Muslim Public Affairs Council in Los Angeles, noted that radicals calling themselves Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish and Christian commit violent acts in various parts of the world, too. "These movements are equally fanatic and threatening, but extremism in the Muslim world receives disproportionate alarm," (<http://www.jannah.org/artcles/media.html>). Obviously, distinctions between mainstream and unconventional groups are important to Muslims no less than to believers in other faiths; for that reason, among others, reporters must educate themselves to know what differentiates one group from another. For instance, most responsible journalists who cover Islam's spread among African-Americans know that the Rev. Louis Farrakhan, an outspoken militant, leads a sectarian branch called the Nation of Islam. They also know that many black Muslims in the United States have moved away from sectarian Islam into orthodox practices and have been welcomed into Islamic gatherings by foreign-born Muslims.

This argument, which represents a widely accepted view, fails to distinguish between promoting Islam by individual Muslims from different walks of life, as a result of the goodness of their character and attitude and the nobility of their actions, on the one hand, and

promoting Islam through planned action undertaken by professionally trained Muslims, on the other. The latter requires the utilization of the most advanced skills and techniques available, most notably arts and technology. Arts include, among others, playwriting, acting, and singing. Technology includes the use of electronic media, whereby transmitted pictures and sounds can be employed to convey the message of Islam. The marriage of the two has produced powerful media, capable of transmitting values, beliefs, and views in the form of movies, theater plays, documentaries, educational programs, talk shows, cartoon shows, and others.

But, despite the importance of electronic media and the profound impact they have made in effecting cultural change, they have not yet become tools and instruments for the dissemination of the message of Islam. One important sign of the lack of appreciation of these powerful tools may be seen in the fact that Islamic higher learning institutions do not consider arts and technology to be useful means for reaching out with the message of Islam, but continue to focus on interpersonal communication, and to a lesser extent on public speaking. Recently, print media has received more emphasis by Islamists. However, newspapers and magazines published by Islamists are very often oriented towards Islamic movement audiences, rather than the public at large.

An internet survey of 1,360 people was carried out by Global Market Insight, Muslim Voice UK, Queens University in Belfast and the University of Liverpool UK Muslims blame Islamophobia on the portrayal of their religion in the media, a survey has revealed. The research found that 40% of Muslims blamed anti-Islamic feelings on the media, while 74% of non-Muslims blamed Islamophobia on the 9/11 bombings. (www.islamophobia-watch.com/islamophobia-watch/2006/7/18/media-blamed-over-islams-image.html)

“The Muslim-West relations have become increasingly strained due to a string of events such as the September 11 attacks in 2001, the Afghanistan war in 2002, the Iraq war, the London bombings in 2005 and the Danish cartoon row (www.religionnewsblog.com/)

“In this current climate, it is essential to gauge Muslim and non-Muslim attitudes with a view to resolving differences. The research found that both sides agree that Muslims and non-Muslims “don’t understand each other” but have different concerns about the cause of the culture clash.

She sets out recommendations including action by the Muslim community and police; breaking down barriers to integration and misunderstandings; tackling discrimination and Islamophobia; measures to deal with extremism; reviewing foreign policy; protecting human rights and more responsible reporting by the media.”

She said: “It was striking that Muslims feel more strongly about international issues than say, their treatment by police or discrimination in the UK. It also appears that Islamophobia, Western foreign policy and human rights abuses of Muslims are contributing substantially to the alienation of UK Muslims.

“On the other hand, non-Muslims are concerned about extremism, the lack of integration, Muslims not being proud to be British and the lack of tolerance by Muslims. However, the biggest threat to good Muslim and non-Muslim community relations is the misinformation on Islam in the media.”

Meanwhile, the UNESCO in July 2005 organized a debate on “Islam, media and public opinion”. Over 150 participants representing the academic world, the media and civil society participated in the debate from which it became clear that any difficulties that may be seen concerning the place of Islam in western society is clearly one of perception and, by no means a reality related to the religion itself or to its practice. A call was made by all participants for more tolerance and openness in dealing with different cultures, religions and socio-cultural backgrounds (www.unesco.org)

CONCLUSION

The inception of mass media has transformed the manner in which information is collected and disseminated. It has been the singular most powerful tool of influence, mobilization and shaping of political, religious, economic, cultural etc. agendas and discourse. As witnessed in the past, such as in the case of World War II and the subsequent wars of the latter century, the use of media propaganda to mobilize a nation is just as prevalent today as it was then. The global media today is a leader in its own accord; its influence surpasses that of any other institution. Therefore, it is vital they maintain an attitude as a global leader; one that is free of biasness, and has accountability for the news, publications, and media images and photographs that profile the event, its causes and effects.

In this regard, given the authority and power of influence that the global media possesses, it should be an instrument that focuses on its ability to resolve conflicts. In the midst of conflicts between religious groups, there has been an attempt to understand, accept and create dialogue between people of various faiths. The global media can be the most influential medium in which this can be accomplished.

In the recent clashes between Islam and Islamic civilizations and that of others, there has been a misconstrued understanding of the religion and its teachings. Islam is a religion that respects all Religions, their Prophets and Holy Books. There lies no disparity between any faiths and their people. As stated clearly in the Holy Quran:

The Holy Quran says "the Messenger Mohammad (Peace be upon him) believes in what has been sent down to him from his Lord and so do the believers. Each one believes in; (a) Almighty, (b) His Angels, (c) His Books and (d) His Messengers. They say We make no distinction Between one and another of His Messengers. We hear and obey, oh! Lord and seek your forgiveness" (Quran 2:285).

The Universal message of the Holy Quran must be emphasized and the Oneness of our Creator is the quintessence of Islam and all religions. For again it is stated in the Holy Quran:

"Surely this community of yours is one community, and I am your Lord; so worship me" (Quran 21:92).

"Those who believe (in the Qur'an), and those who follow the Jewish (scriptures), and the Christians and the Sabians - any who believe in Almighty and the Last Day, and work righteousness, shall have their reward with their Lord; on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve." (Quran 2:62)

The essence of Islam believes in the unity of Man, as created from a single source and by One Creator:

"O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other. Verily

the most honored of you in the sight of Almighty is the most righteous of you. And Almighty has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things)." (Quran 49:13)

To deny the verses stated above, would be the denial of Islam and our Creator. Therefore, it must be reiterated that if a Muslim perpetuates acts of violence against people of other Faiths, it would be a violation of the Islamic Faith and consequently, they are not considered Muslims, but as Unbelievers. Just as the any acts of terrorism cannot subject an entire people, society or nation, it must be noted that isolate acts of terrorism by extremists cannot be blamed upon a population of 1.3 million Muslims dispersed around the world.

Therefore, the Media should emphasize on the universal message of Islam; and by doing so, they can be a medium through which conflicts can be resolved. Moreover, the Media today has the absolute power over all other institutions of Religion, Politics, Societies and Culture. Its influence and role is that of a universal guardian; an institution that formulates religious, cultural, social and political values. Its role must be played in a positive direction; one of unity and the advocator of the Oneness of all Religions and Faiths.

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