

Islam and the West: Bridging the Misconceptions

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INTRODUCTION

Contemplating on the subject of the Islam and the West, a series of complex issues and questions arises pertaining to the relationship between the two. First and foremost, a clear definition of the West must be established and secondly, aspects of Islam or Islamic civilizations/societies must be narrowed down and selected to discuss the topic. For, there is no such phenomenon that Islam as solely a political/social/cultural or economic construct. It is a religion that encompasses all of the latter components and much more; it is a way of life based on the guidance of the Holy Quran and the teachings of the Prophet Mohammad (SAW). Due to the universality of these messages, in essence, there exists no disparity between the West and Islam. Furthermore, no violence can be projected to non-Muslims unless it is in retaliation.

The importance of human rights in Islam is particularly signified from the similarity between the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the United Nations on 10th December 1948 and the rules laid down in the Holy Quran 1400 years ago. The Declaration states that all human beings are born free and equal and are entitled to all the rights and freedoms without any distinction of race, color, sex, language, religion, political, social origin, property, birth or other status and also has the right to life, liberty and security of person. No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment and be entitled in full equality to a fair, independent and impartial tribunal. Everyone in a penal offence shall be presumed innocent until proven guilty and shall not be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to attacks upon his honor and reputation.

The emphasis of UN declaration on Human Rights, 1948 and Human Security, 2001 are similar to principles laid down in many verses of the Holy Quran, amongst which few are stated below:

“And what is wrong with you that you fight not in the Cause of Allah, and for those weak, ill-treated, and oppressed among men, women, and children, whose cry is: “Our Lord! Rescue us from this town whose people are oppressors; and raise for us from You one who will protect, and raise for us from You one who will help”

- (Surah An-Nisa: Verse 75)

‘that if anyone killed a person not in retaliation of murder, or (and) to spread mischief in the land- it would be as if he killed all mankind, and if anyone saved a life, it would be as if he saved the life of all’

- (Surah Al-Maida: Verse 32)

This clearly defines the underlying meaning of this; which is that human beings should respect the sanctity of other human beings because there is no disparity between one life and another. For Islam, justice is the focal point of all its teachings. And therefore Islam condones unjust bloodshed.

But for the purpose of discussion on the issues regarding the recent tensions between Western States and Islamic Political groups, both non-Muslims and Muslims acknowledge the fact that there has been a rise of Islamic Militancy in the last three decades; many of which use Islam as the source of their political doctrine. Thus, the phobia of the “Islamic Threat” is one that had dominated the global political arena.

In constructing a research paper, the issue of the so-called Islamic threat and the rise of Islamic Militancy will be approached in several ways. Primarily, the research will question whether this threat can be defined as a cohesive embodiment and representation of all Muslims dispersed around the world, with vast cultural, national and language differences. Or whether it is a concern derived from the small percentage of Muslim extremists who use Islam as a political tool for the attainment of political goals and power. Secondly, in deconstructing the threat of the rise of Islamic Militancy, the paper will attempt to reflect on the various scholars and thinkers and their stand on it being a reality or a myth. In comparing the different academic theories surrounding this, it will conclude by how this has come to shape contemporary global politics. Lastly, an evaluation on the universal teachings of Islam will argue to contradict this perceived threat. The paper will conclude with a proposal from the Institute of Hazrat Mohammad (SAW) on bridging this divide and initiatives that should be taken towards justice and peace.

THE RISE OF GLOBAL ISLAMIC MILITANCY

Islam: according to Judeo-Christian civilizations, has been historically in conflict with its Judeo-Christian counterpart has had a recent revival in the past thirty or so years. The differences between political Islam has existed and have been fundamentally rooted from its origins, but have been undermined due to the lack of cohesiveness of political Islam before the 1970's. Perhaps with the dissolvment of the Cold War, Political Islam is one of the many movements that derived from the Cold War; a time has come where the great power play no longer rests between two superpowers. Rather, the reality of the involvement of 'Third World' politics in Global Politics is just as much on the Western countries' agenda today as USSR was in the latter part of the last century.

Of course, with the emergence of Fundamental groups such as the Al-Quaida and its attack of the twin towers on September 11th, 2001 not only shocked the United States and its allies in Europe, but the rest of the world. It forced the US to recognize the problem and tensions between the West, particularly the US, and that of the Muslims in the Middle East. Although the interests of the US masses shifted overnight towards this unfamiliar religion, the US government was involved with its dealing with the Arab-Muslim world long before September 11th. The hype of this sudden threat and phobia is the fear that unifies Americans once again under an 'ism' like the threat of Nazism and Communism of the past. Furthermore, it facilitates the merge of the US, Western Europe under a common agenda.

But how much this threat is real? Can one actually define this threat as a cohesive embodiment and representation of all Muslims dispersed around the world, with vast cultural, national, and language differences? Or is the “Islamic threat” derived from the small percentage of Muslim Fundamentalists, who use Islam as a political tool for power. In deconstructing the ‘Islamic threat’, I will attempt to reflect on the various thinkers of this ‘threat’ as reality or a myth. In comparing the different theories surrounding this, it questions the existence of a common Islamic identity. In doing so, it elaborates on the reasons pertaining to the rise of Islamic militancy and the controversial debate that shapes contemporary politics in the world today. Lastly, it attempts to reflect on the universal teachings of Islam and Prophet Mohammad (SAW). It concludes with a proposal from the Institute of Hazrat Mohammad (SAW) on the means to rectify this misunderstanding between Islam and the West in order to establish mutual understanding for the establishment of peace and justice.

THEORIES SUPPORTING THE EXISTENCE OF A THREAT

In order to understand these differences perceived by the West, perhaps the best article to go to is *The Clash of Civilizations (CC)* by Samuel Huntington, where he bases the differences between Islam and the West as one that is fundamental and prevalent throughout History due to the clashes with the Judeo-Christian civilizations. He believes that it is no longer States that represents the identity or the struggles of its people, rather, the differences of civilizations is the core reason for these clashes. In the future, the clashes will be between civilizations. The world will be shaped in large measure by the interactions among seven or eight major civilizations. These include western, Confucian, Japanese, Islamic, Hindu, Slavic-Orthodox, Latin American, and possibly African civilizations. The most important conflicts of the future will occur along the cultural fault lines separating these civilizations (CC 25). Religion is a central defining characteristic of civilizations, and, as Christopher Dawson said, “the great religions are the foundations on which the great civilizations rest.” Of Weber’s five “world religions”, four- Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Confucianism-are associated with major civilizations. (Farid, 4). Western civilization is usually dated as emerging about A.D. 700 or 800. It is generally viewed by scholars as having three major components: in Europe, North America, and Latin America. The West, then, includes Europe, North America, plus other European settler countries such as Australia and New Zealand.

Huntington analyzed the causes of the clash of civilizations and the fault lines of inter-state and inter-ethnic or inter-communal conflicts. He says that conflicts have to be dealt with at civilizational levels beyond the national boundaries. The Clash of the civilizations can be between civilizations over territory or on a global scale, where states from these various civilizations will compete for military and economic power while promoting their political and religious values (CC, 29). Furthermore, these civilizations will confront the West in three ways: isolation, conformity, or competition. Perhaps the sharpest line is that between the Western and Islamic civilizations (Bukay, 127). Fundamentalist Islam is hostile to the West where modernity, secularism and democracy are seen as a direct contradiction to Islam (Bukay, 126). Values of individualism, liberalism, human rights, freedom and the separation of religion from the state have little or no connection to Islam (Bukay,

h128). Huntington's claim that religion is a more unifying factor than nationality unifies Muslims and therefore a common threat. These cultural values will be the main incentive for states and the center of a collective identity (CC,27). The inability of the Muslim world to adjust with basic values of the West will bring about the clash of cultural values (Bukay, 127). Many perceive the Islamic threat as the West's next threat. Lewis also emphasizes this point by saying that '...there is no less than a clash of civilizations-the perhaps irrational but surely historic reaction of an ancient our Judeo-Christian heritage, our secular present, and the worldwide expansion of both' (CC, 32).

The Islamic threat has conceptualized with emergence of the West, in particular, the US and Western European countries, as they dominate the political agenda of the world. As Huntington adds that the West uses international institutions such as the IMF, along with military power and economic resources to direct the course of global politics to maintain the status of Western dominance and to implement its own political and economic values (CC, 40). This directly brings about hostility to those Arab Muslim States who oppose to Western intervention in the Arab world through their military might and economic interests. This has also fuelled the opposition to the West and its values. Finally Huntington concludes that the wealth of non-Western civilizations will increase relative to the West and a time will come when the military might be one that the West can no longer ignore. Rather, the West will have to find ways to incorporate these civilizations that are so drastically different and opposing to its own (CC, 49).

This new Islamic threat has been seen also in parallel to communism by Daniel Pipes. He argues that similar to Communism, Islam rejects the central, social and cultural concepts of the West (Bukay, 129). He believes that Fundamentalist Islam is radical, utopian movement that is similar to Communist and fascist movements than a traditional religion (Bukay, 129). The West is the obstacle of its struggle for worldwide supremacy and he makes no distinction between good and bad fundamentalism, since they are all opposed to the West. Pipes also says that there often is a gap between the new born fundamentalist and Islamic tradition and they ignore the fundamental facts of Islam (Kramer, 54). And that is that these fundamentalists blame the West for its own failures and backwardness. They have used Islam as an ideology to run their countries and organizations and less as a structure in which individuals make their lives (Kramer, 60). Consequently, Muslim fundamentalists compare Islam to other ideologies rather than with other religion. 'What distinguishes Islamic extremism from other forms of extremism is not terrorism; it is the naked pursuit of political power' (Kramer, 106). Kramer reinstates that Militant Islam cannot be democratic, pluralistic, egalitarian, or pro-Western (Bukay, 129).

In conclusion all these thinkers agree on one common basis of the Islamic threat as a reality; it is Islam versus the West and it's detest for the West. So, the tension between Political Islam and the Democratic West is part of the already pre-disposed and inherent differences of the Western and Islamic civilizations historically and continue to strive through the power play of politics today. In this sense, the two cannot co-exist because both civilizations see itself as the ultimate way of life. So one cannot see Political Islamists as democratic politicians, rather fundamentalists. Islamic Politics is Islamic Fundamentalism. As Bernard Lewis argues

'fundamentalist leaders are not mistaken in seeing in Western civilization the greatest challenge to the way of life that they wish to retain or restore for their people' (*Esposito*, 79). Also 'Fundamentalists wage war against modernity: secularism, Western capitalism, and democracy' (*Esposito*, 179).

THEORIES NEGATING THE EXISTENCE OF A THREAT

Although there may be a basis for this argument of profound and clear differences between Islamic and Western civilizations, other scholars have argued against the intricacies of these tension and differences that have built throughout history and they look at the details of this very delicate debate. As Robert Satloff articulates that 'there are virtually no references to the fact at there are hundreds of millions of Muslims who oppose all aspects of the Islamists resurgence, that there are secular Muslims, Muslim social democrats, Muslim free-market liberals or even Muslim communists...one would think that there are two types of Muslims in the world: one the one hand, Muslims who pray five times a day, fast during Ramadan wear the hijab and want an Islamist state; and on the other hand, Muslims who pray five times a day, fast during Ramadan, wear the hijab, and don't want an Islamist state. In reality, the vast majority of the world's billion Muslims fit in some other category' (*Kramer*, 109). A strong argument against this stereotype is articulated by John Esposito, whereby; he says that one must move beyond the view that Muslims and the Muslim world (both government and social movements) are unified (*Esposito*, preface).

Esposito argues that much of the West's perception of Islam is stereotyped and has been hampered with the media's tendency to lump Islam with Islamic activism and Islamic leaders as radicals, terrorist and anti-American (*Esposito*, 169). Furthermore, since the West equates Islam with threat, it is common for people to realize that the West itself may be a threat to Islam. He supports this by discussing the expansive nature of American imperialism and prior to this, the oppressiveness of European colonial rule (*Esposito*, 171). As with the stereotyping of past 'enemies' of the US such as the Soviet Union during the Cold War, the US again creates this threat and therefore, the enemy is perceived to be more dangerous than it really is and "in some ways, the attitude of the West toward communism seems at times transferred to or replicated in the new threat, Islamic fundamentalism" (*Esposito*, 172). Rather than understanding the specific reasons for the media propaganda and the generalizations made toward Muslims, one falls victim to the conformity of the media, whereby Islam is portrayed as a religion of rage, violence, irrationality and most of all anti-West (*Esposito*, 174).

Islam is seen as a political, demographic and socio-religious threat to the West, but Esposito argues that the rage and hatred and the use of religion to justify ones actions is not applicable solely to Muslims to many people-Jews, Christians, Sikhs and Hindus. Many people are enraged when their culture and way of life is threatened. Also, Islam and Islamic activism has been boiled down to extremism and terrorism whereas Esposito adds that violence, terrorism and injustice exist not exclusively to Islam, but inclusive of Judaism, Christianity and secular ideologies such as democracy and communism (*Esposito*, 198).

The notion of the Separation of State and Church is relatively new even in the West, but that has transformed today, where personal belief system and the distinction of that from State has been engrained as the positive and correct system that all States should abide by. Therefore, Political Islam poses a threat to that very same notion of freedom and instead is regarded as 'abnormal, dangerous, and extremist' (*Esposito, 199*). Much of the literature that is written and taught comes from writers who are secular and therefore bias. Furthermore, they have limited exposure, interest and experience which leads them to generalize and stereotype. 'Viewing Islam and the events in the Muslim world primarily through the prism of violence and terrorism has resulted in a failure to see the breadth and depth of contemporary Islam' (*Esposito, 199*). To conclude, Esposito sees Islamic movements as not anti-Western and rather they are positive movements and that the West should see them as vital part of Islamic society. The fact that the Middle East is going through a process of democratization is enough evidence that they are willing to compromise by joining the government coalitions. There is no necessary opposition between Islam and democracy and one needs to distinguish between the moderate forces and extremist minority in Islam (*Bukay, 131*).

Other political scientists also contradicts the basic claims of the clashes between the two civilizations. They believe that the true conflicts between Islam and the West are not cultural but rather a strive for power and regional and international influence. The fact that Islam poses challenges on Western supremacy and values. It is argued that the neo-Third Worldism interpretation whereby an inherent contradiction between Western democratic values and Islam does not exist (*Bukay, 133*). This directly contradicts Huntingdon's view of the inevitable clashes of civilizations from which a lot of logical arguments of the Islamic threat have derived from.

As any religion or culture, one must not fall in the trap of stereotyping. Isn't that something that is taught in most disciplines in the Western education system? Then why is it that Islam is categorized under a set of rigid definitions where all Muslims of the world are encompassed? This next argument of Fred Halliday, where he says that at the very core Islamic definition has been 'fundamentalism' and therefore, 'Islamist' (*Halliday, 107*). Many Muslims do not identify nor are supporters of Political Islam. He argues that the term 'Muslim' does not define ethnicity and it ignores national identification. He says that 'other identities- social, ethnic, linguistic and national all play a part...the idea that 'Islam' as such provides an identity, explanation and moral code for all actions undertaken by Muslims is a clear simplification (*Halliday, 114-115*). There is no one Islamic people as there are no peoples whose ethnic identity is defined by religion alone. Furthermore, he states that fundamentalism was not unique to Islam, but also 'in India, movements of Hindu chauvinism mobilized millions, and in the USA Christian fundamentalism has played a significant role in politics' (*Halliday, 117*). Therefore, perhaps the Islamic 'threat' is one that is obscure due to the lack of cohesiveness of all Muslim people as one with a common agenda of 'Islamizing' the world. It is because they do not represent coherent, internationally constituted alliance and because of the fact that Islamic States will always be weaker than the West, there really is no 'Islamic challenge' (*Halliday, 119*).

ISLAM AS A COMMON IDENTITY

In trying to understand the various arguments articulated in the debate over the 'Islamic threat', these arguments have undoubtedly grounded legitimacies. The September 11th attack on the US by Islamic fundamentalist would only reinforce the arguments set forth by scholars in the first part of this paper. But, as a Muslim from a secular and liberal Muslim country, I feel that the events of that day are isolated of what is meant to be Islam. As Dr. Elias Zerhoini, an American Muslim so expressively said that "it's a disservice to both sides to cartoonize Islam, to emphasize just one form of dress, one concept, one position, rather than present something as it truly is in its many manifestations, in its reality which is complex and not as uniform as people might like it to be" (Cateura, 47).

Although presently, 1.4 million Muslims dispersed around the world is taking the repercussions and blame of isolated terrorist acts committed by a few groups as acts of "Islamic terrorism", this connotation of terrorism as religion based seems to be exclusively labeled on to Muslims. This tendency of religious profiling of crimes is both unfortunate and illogical. It should be noted that terrorism has been defined as "those acts which are intended to create fear or "terror", are perpetrated for an ideological goal, and deliberately target "non-combatants" (*Wikipedia*). "Terror" or terrorism, isn't a thing you can have a war against. It is a paramilitary technique, equally available to Tamils in Sri Lanka, Islamists in Algeria, and Catholics in Northern Ireland (*Bangladesh Today, April 25, 2007*). It should be mentioned here that these Islamist insurgents are using the name of Islam as a guise to gain their political and economic goals. Their vision of Islam is narrow in its vision and although there may be aspects of Islamic teachings and beliefs that may be threatened by the Western intervention, by no means, does that encompass Islam as a whole. Omar Abu-Namous, a leading Imam in New York city describes these militant groups as "...an isolated group of persons who are very parochial, with narrow understanding...They read the text of the Holy Quran and form an understanding, so narrow, as if you would peek through a peephole and think you had a view of the room inside. No, you would have a very small view of the room" (Cateura, 23). It is the modes of thought of some interpreters in the theologian class, and their non-contextual literal-deductionist reasoning, together with a total unconcern for justice and fairness as the basis of law, which has made Muslim peoples project an image of extreme bigotry and intolerance. Nonetheless, these terrorist acts were terrorism and no religious populations should have to be made guilty for such violent acts that do not have any religious justification.

Observing from examples of History, we can see that acts of terrorism was rarely attached to religious connotations. According to M. Asafuddowlah, Editor, *The Bangladesh Today*, the greatest acts of terrorism in the history of this planet was the dropping of the atomic bombs on Japan in 1945, instantly killing over two hundred thousand unarmed men, women and children and maiming several hundreds of thousands of innocents civilians. He further argues that Christian Institutes on Prophet Jesus Christ (Peace Be Upon Him) or the organisations dedicated to Prophet Moses (Peace be Upon Him), or to the teachings of Hinduism have not felt any necessity to defend their faiths as messages of peaceful co-existence.

Under the definition of terrorism stated before, M. Asafuddowlah, gives numerous examples of violent acts which no particular religion was accused of being attached to it. He says, "when the Jews massacred all the population of Deir Yassin in 1948, Israel was not accused of terrorism. When Sabra and Shatila refugee camps were destroyed and 3500 unarmed Palestinian and Lebanese men, women and children were killed, Sharon was not pointed out as a Jewish terrorist. When Bush and Blair attacked Afghanistan and Iraq, it was not profiled as acts of Christian terrorists. When Muslims were killed in Kashmir and Gujarat, Vajpayee is not spoken of as a Hindu terrorist. When Muslims are killed in Chechnya, Putin is not referred to as an Orthodox Christian terrorist. When Muslim men, women and children were killed in Croatia and Bosnia, it was termed as 'ethnic cleansing' and not acts of terrorism. When Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols killed hundreds of people in a bomb explosion in Oklahoma City in 1995, that deliberate act of brazen terrorism was not attributed to a Christian terrorist" (*The Bangladesh Today*,).

In short, many Muslims do not identify with it solely for the fact that once again religion has been used as a political tool. The fact there are over a 1.4 billion Muslims around the world whose differences can be so vast, that one cannot simplify it as under Islam. Whereas once in history, people fell under a common identity and therefore a common agenda, today the identity of people vary significantly and no longer fall into the traditional definition of one identity or another. Therefore, to be a Muslim is just not enough reason to have a common enemy and hatred for that enemy.

It is not just for the sanctity of Islam and its understanding of it, that Muslims should make this distinction. It is the collaborative need to understand the knowledge and core principles of a religion that consists of 1.4 billion people around the world, in order to prevent this misconception upon which Muslims are not only subjected at present, but also as a negative propaganda upon which history will be recorded.

Therefore, in assessing the causes of any type of militancy, in this case, Islamic militancy and its subsequent examples of terrorist acts, one must further analyse the reasons upon which these extremist groups have evolved and use violence as a sole means. Prior to further elaboration on this point, it must be noted, that any sort of violence on innocent lives is gravely punishable within Islam and there lies no justification for such acts of killing. But since this paper is attempting to look at terrorism as an output of political events in the last several decades, it is vital to assess its beginnings from a political standpoint.

THE REASONS FOR THE RISE OF POLITICAL ISLAM AND MILITANT ISLAMIC MOVEMENTS

Although the previous above theories and arguments defy the existence of a global threat posed by Islam, it does not mean that one can claim to ignore that there has been a tangible rise and situation of political and military Islam that has been globally experienced in the last thirty or more years.

At the height of European colonial expansion in the 19th century, most of the Islamic world was under colonial rule with the exception of a few regions. Therefore, with

decolonization, Muslim states not only wanted to gain their political independence, but they also wanted to assert their own religious and cultural identity. From the 18th century onward Muslim reformers appeared upon the scene sought to reassert the teachings of Islam and to reform society on the basis of Islamic teachings. With western influence beginning to penetrate more deeply into the fiber of Islamic society, organizations gradually grew up whose goal was to reform society in practice along Islamic lines and prevent its secularization. These included the Muslim Brotherhood (Ikhwan al-muslimin) founded in Egypt and with branches in many Muslim countries, and the Jama'at-I Islami of Pakistan founded by the influential Mawlana Mawdudi. These organizations have been usually peaceful and have sought to reestablish an Islamic order through education.

During the last two decades, however, as a result of the frustration of many Muslims in the face of pressures coming from a secularized outside world, some have sought to reject the negative aspects of Western thought and culture and to return to an Islamic society based on the Shari'ah. In the case of the widespread desire for Muslims to have the religious law of Islam applied and to reassert their religious values and their own identity must not be equated with exceptional violent eruptions which do exist but which are usually treated sensationally and taken out of proportion by the mass media in the West.

Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. stated that the "ideas of individual liberty, political democracy, the rule of law, human rights, and cultural freedom...are European ideas. This is what makes Western civilization unique. On the contrary, Huntington elaborates on the dangers of western universalism; "in the emerging world of ethnic conflict and civilizational clash, Western belief in the universality of Western culture suffers from three problems: it is false, it is immoral; and it is dangerous. If the West as the current dominant civilization continues to try to impose its system on others, naturally there will be resentment and resistance. Huntington further explains that "as a result, the early years of the twenty-first century are likely to see an ongoing resurgence of non-Western power and culture and the clash of the peoples of non-Western civilizations with the West and with each other." According to Huntington, it is most important, to recognize that Western intervention in the affairs of other civilization is probably the single most dangerous source of instability and potential global conflict in multi-civilizational world (CC).

"In the late 1970's, a new political force emerged, militant Islam. This political movement, steeped in the religion of Islam, sought to resurrect the world of Islam, to free from the debilitating and overbearing influence of such outside forces as Communism, secularism, and above all the pervading Western presence", (*McWilliams & Piotrowski, 413*). From this statement, it can be deduced that the rise of Political and Militant Islam has been seen as a cohesive embodiment of Muslims globally, who are unilaterally against the West and Western civilization, culture and politics. Nonetheless, even if some dominant Western states and their media portrays this as an "Islamic Cause", if there are such sentiments of Muslim unity, this cannot be judged from a religious point of view, but more appropriately, a conflict that has risen from repercussions of injustices of the political course that has taken place in the last several decades.

According to Bill Christison, Former member of the Central Intelligence Agency, extremists see themselves as trying to do is to stop the United States from continuing its drive for global hegemony, including hegemony over the islamic world. He continues to sat that Prseident Bush’s oversimplified categorization of the “evil ones” or the “axis of evil” (Iran, Iraq and North Korea), makes it easier for the U.S government to avoid any inconvenient discussion of ways in which it’s the U.S might modify its foreign policy to reduce the likelihood of future terrorist acts. He further identifies what he describes as the six root causes of terrorism and argues that force to address them may not be ineffective but also counterproductive. They are as follows:

- (1) The US policies of Israel with respect to Palestenians, and the belief among Arabs and Muslims that the United States is as much to blame as Israel itself for continuing, almost a 40-year-old Israeli occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.
- (2) The present drive of the United States to spread its hegemony and its version of big-corporation, free enterprise globalisation around the world. At the same time, the massive povery of average people, not only in the Arab and Muslim nations but alsoin the whole third world, has become more important as a global political issue. The gap between rich and poor nations, and rich and poor people within most of the nations, has grown wider during the last 25 yaears of globalization or, more precisely, the U.S version of globalization. Animosities against the United States have grown among the poor of the world, who have watched as the U.S has expandedboth its hegemony and a type of globalization based on its own economic system, while they themselves have seen no or very little benefit from these changes.
- (3) The continuing sanctions and lack of food and medicines for the people of Iraq, death of Iraqi children, and almost daily bombings of Iraq by the U.S and Great Britain. Since this was published in 2002, I would like to addto this, the wars led by the U.S and Great Britain in Afghanistan and Iraq and now condemning Iran and Syria as “rogue states”.
- (4) The presence of U.S troops in Saudi Arabia in the past.
- (5) The dissatisfaction and anger of many average and even elite Arabs and Muslims over their own authoritarian, un-democratic, and often corrupt governments, which are supported by the United States.
- (6) U.S “war on terrorism” is the last root cause. It has to do with the kind of war the U.S is now able to fight. On recent three occassions—the Gulf War of 1990-1991, the Kosovo war of 1999 against Yugoslavia, and wars against Afghanistan and Iraq—the United States has easily achieved victories by relying almost exclusively on air power, on missiles launched from a great distance, and now even on drone aircraft with no humans on board. The U.S has won these wars with practically no casualties among its own forces. But while few Americans get killed, sizable numbers of other nationalities do.

These six points refer to the basis for the rise of terrorism in Islamic States. Recent analysis of many scholars and poltitical scientists on the rise of terrorism agrees with

the above claims, especially regarding to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. It is of the opinion that the refuse to solve outstanding conflicts, especially in the Middle East, which is the major contributing factor to terrorism. Whether the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq actually increased the “terrorist threat” to the West is still a contentious issue among military experts and strategic analysts, but they certainly didn’t diminish it by much.

Perhaps the issue of terrorism and its origins is so in-rooted in the façade of globalization and its promises of economic wealth, it has become difficult to differentiate the problem of unequal distribution of wealth from its religious and cultural aspect taken by those effected by its repercussions. “Perhaps the answer is to root out the underlying causes of terrorism, such as poverty, ignorance, oppression, and injustice” (Pojman, 221). The United Nations summit in New York had concluded that poverty is the main reason for inhumanity and violence. It was an inexact conclusion. The root cause of violence is not poverty—it is injustice. The most painful denial to a person or to a community is the denial of justice.

(i) The Wars in Muslim States as a Cause

When injustice is the ingredient within the emergence of these violent groups, then there is a need for closer examination at the wars fought in the last fifty years against Muslim states. Even though the means of their warfare is undeniably wrong, perhaps the cause for their anger is not misplaced.

The wars fought in Iraq, Afghanistan, Palestine, Bosnia, and Kashmir has been severely unfair to Muslims populations. In the long drawn out dispute between Israel and Palestine, Israel has been unilaterally supported by the West, especially the United States. Prior to labeling Saddam Hussein as an oppressive dictator, an enemy of the United States and a threat to the world, it was the United States that funded him in to fight the war against Iran (who was then the rouge state that threatened the institution of democracy). Prior to being the kingpin of global terrorism, Osama Bin-Laden was a product of the United States Government. He was the freedom fighter that fought direly against their Russian occupants. So how is it that these two men, who were both entirely backed both militarily and financially for several decades under Bush Sr. when he was the head of the Central Intelligence Agency and later Vice-President and President of the U.S, suddenly become the enemies of United States under the Bush Jr. presidency. How is it that in an overnight shift of positions, these two men pose a threat not only to state sovereignty but to global security.

This emphasis on “new threats”, “weak states” and “rogue states” is an integral part of Washington’s attempts to fashion new institutional arrangements at the global level that can more effectively deal with any present or future challenges to its hegemonic power. According to the article published in the Bangladesh Today, “by selling its response to the 9/11 tragedy as part of a “Global War on Terrorism”, the United States managed to receive unprecedented international backing for its projection of military power....of course, the U.S suffered a setback when it invaded Iraq in open defiance of the international community and failed to find any weapons of mass destruction. One has to question where these weapons of mass destruction are. The world has been fed over and over again this propaganda of hidden weapons and biological warfare;

but at the end, neither Britain nor the U.S could produce either in Iraq. But the cost of the war has been high. With the Americans spending their tax money on a cause that cannot be justified, and for those Iraqi's who continue to suffer the consequences.

According to a study by Linda Blimes and Joseph Stiglitz, the total cost of the war in Iraq thus far has been \$2.239 trillion, and the cost may soon touch \$3 trillion (New Age, May 21, 2007). Now looking back at the bombed and devastated Iraq, during the four years of occupation from 2003 to 2007 estimates, corroborated by the prestigious British scientific journal, The Lancet, suggests that 650,000 Iraqis were killed (out of a total population of 25 million), some two million refugees left the country and an equal number have become internal refugees. Over half of Iraq's 4.5 million children are malnourished. But the war on terror shows no sign of succeeding. In 2006, worldwide terror attacks increased 29 per cent, mostly due to the surge in the attacks on civilians in Iraq and Afghanistan. And these do not include attacks on US groups (New Age, May 21, 2007).

(ii) The Issue of Nuclear Weapons

The docile press swallows whatever it dishes out by the white House. If the prime rational for war was Saddam Hussein possession of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD), is disproved and a new casus belli is invented midway, the 'embedded' American media is there any way to act as a government tool. No one asked from where Saddam Hussein obtained his WMD or whether he manufactured it himself. And if destruction of WMD is an utmost necessity than this should apply to whichever country possesses it; how is it that Iraq alone is chosen for being rendered harmful. The same is in the case of Iran. Following the forced fall of Saddam Hussein, Iran has been the subject of immense scrutiny for supposedly building nuclear weapons, which will, once again pose a dire threat to global security. The fact remains that in the history of the world, the United States is the only country that deployed and used their nuclear bombs on Japan, for which they have justified their means. Ironically, it is now the United States that seems to be concerned on the issue of nuclear proliferation, especially where third world nations are concerned.

If nuclear deterrence is the reason to why the U.S spends a significant amount of its defense budget on nuclear weapons, why this defense can't be used by other nations is baffling. Especially in the light of the recent tensions between Tehran and Washington, Iran seems to be once again under the spotlight of a threatening state. To much of the world's dismay on the war on Iraq, the U.S warned to wage war on Iran if it does not comply with its rules regarding nuclear proliferation. The tendency for powerful countries to use force against smaller countries under one pretext of another; the nuclear arms race, which is now leading to weaponisation of outer space as well as the search for smaller, useable nukes are all contradictory to the U.S advocating of global security. So it seems as though that only in the case of an Islamic state trying to build a defense system and nuclear weapons is categorized as a threat. Although deterrence can prevent wars from occurring, the bias dominance of the United States bullying the world to conform to its hegemonic power is strengthened by its military might.

Hence, if there is to be a more multilateral world, whereby politics and economic policies are made communally, then there should be equal rules for nuclear proliferation. In spite of this, the whole issue of Ballistic Missile Defense announced by President Bush in May 2001 is believed to be a manifestation of his unilateral foreign policy. While the U.S is dictating the world on its military, economic and political progress, the U.S should take a closer look within and re-evaluate its position on the very same policies that they impose on others. Furthermore, given that India and Pakistan are making significant progress in nuclear risk reduction, there is a realization that this globe must adjust its priorities.

SUMMARY

Whether we choose to evolve and mature is not a matter choice; rather it has been a process that compels us to make changes. Politics can no longer be conducted as it was a century ago. Judging from the two world wars and all consequent division into a bi-polar world, politics is no longer about the sole protection of one nation and its state sovereignty. Additionally, with globalization, it is economic power that dictates global policies and politics. As United States Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, so rightly claimed that the emergence of new threats had shifted “the very terrain of international politics...beneath our feet”. In the old world, which began in 1945 and presumably ended with the demise of the Soviet Union, “the most serious threats to peace and security emerged between states and were largely defined by their borders”. Today, however, “the greatest threats we face emerge within states and melt through their borders-transnational threats like terrorism and weapons proliferation, pandemic disease and trafficking in human being”. The world has developed as such, that the problems of one nation is no longer a far and distant cry; all things are interlinked and if the peace and security of one state and its people are compromised, then it effects other nations as well.

Although Huntington is not wrong in claiming the basic differences of civilizations, which of course still exists today, one has to also take into account the way the world changing in terms of emerging nationalities and boundaries through globalization. Perhaps the view of the world as so black and white is no longer applicable, where there is one ‘bad guy’ trying to take over the world. i.e. as we have seen during the Cold War with Communism. Rather, we should be able to realize that yes there are differences and those differences are not seen as threat but perhaps applicable in the context of that state and culture (as with some Muslim countries).

The Islamic world remains today a vast land stretching from the Atlantic to the Pacific, with an important presence in Europe and America, animated by the teachings of Islam and seeking to assert its own identity. Despite the presence of nationalism and various secular ideologies in their midst, Muslims wish to live in the modern world but without simply imitating blindly the ways followed by the West. The Islamic world wishes to live at peace with the West as well as the east but at the same time not to be dominated by them. It wishes to devote its resources and energies to building a better life for its people on the basis of the teachings of Islam and not to squander its resources in either internal or external conflicts. It seeks finally to create better understanding with the West and to be better understood by the West. The

destinies of the Islamic world and the West cannot be totally separated and therefore it is only through understanding each other better that they can serve their own people more successfully and also contribute to a better life for the whole of humanity.

UNIVERSAL TEACHINGS OF ISLAM AND ITS APPLICATION BY PROPHET MOHAMMAD (SAW)

Islam as a religion began by preaching the basic doctrine of the right of the individual to choose his religion freely. Significantly, the Covenant of the State of Madina drawn up by Prophet Mohammad (SAW) provided for a confederation of Jewish, pagan and Muslim tribes, who were guaranteed complete autonomy in their religious affairs. It was one of the refrains of Prophet Mohammad (SAW)'s message that it was not the fact of belonging to any particular religious fold that would guarantee salvation. Instead, the emphasis was shifted to dependency on sincerity of belief in our Creator, human fraternity, and righteous conduct based on the core values of justice and compassion.

The Prophet Mohammad (SAW) organized a new community in Medina on the basis of shared goals. Prophet Mohammad (SAW) had become the Head of a collection of tribal groups that were not bound together by blood but by a shared ideology, an astonishing innovation in Arabian society. Nobody was forced to convert to the religion of the Holy Quran, but Muslims, pagans and Jews all belonged to one Ummah, that prohibited them to attack one another, and vowed to give each other protection.

Prophet Mohammad (SAW) never asked Jews or Christians to accept Islam, unless they particularly wished to do so, because they had received perfectly valid revelations of their own. It was the profound patience, endurance and immense faith of Prophet Mohammad (SAW) that allowed Islam to be voluntarily adopted in an evolutionary process rather than one that was imposed on its subjects. The Holy Quran insists strongly that there shall be no coercion in matters of faith, and commands Muslims to respect the beliefs of Jews and Christians, whom the Holy Quran calls ahl al-kitab, a phrase translated as for our Creator and your Creator is One and the same, and it is unto Him that we all surrender ourselves. People of the Book but which more accurately rendered: people of an earlier revelation.

For a religion that accepts and embraces other religions and the freedom to practice them accordingly, there cannot be hatred for non-Muslims as exemplified by these minor militant groups and then further exaggerated by the media. Acceptance of religious pluralism as part of Our Creator's will has been validated by the Holy Quran, which also authenticates places of worship built by other faith communities as spaces where Our Creator is remembered. The Holy Book and the Prophet Mohammad (SAW)'s traditions do not stand in the way of the enjoyment of freedom of religion by all persons and communities in Muslim countries, as is also required by human rights norms.

In this regard the Holy Quran states:

“The Messenger Mohammad (SAW) believed in what has been sent down to him from his Lord and so do the believers. Each one believes in; (a) Allah, (b) His angels (c) His Books and (d) His Messenger. They say we make no distinction between one and another of His Messengers. We hear and obey, oh! Lord and seek your forgiveness”

(Surah Baqara: Verse 285)

“Then We revealed to thee (Prophet Mohammad (SAW) Follow the ways of Abraham the True in faith, and he joined not gods with Allah.”

(Surah Nahal: Verse 123)

O mankind! Lo! We have created you male and female, and have made you nations and tribes that ye may know one another. Lo! The noblest of you, in the sight of Allah, is the best in conduct. Lo! Allah is Knower, Aware.

(Al Hujurat: Verse 13)

These messages are universal in its nature. Since these messages are universal and identical, it is incumbent on all people to believe in all divine messages. This is why Prophet Mohammad (SAW) believed in the Prophethood of Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus, for Our Creator’s religion is indivisible and Prophethood is also indivisible. If prophet Mohammad (SAW) and his followers believe in all prophets, all people must also and equally believe in him. Disbelief in him would be equivalent to disbelief in all, for this would arbitrarily upset the line of prophetic succession.

The Prophet Mohammad (SAW) promulgated the Charter of Madina, which set out the rights and duties of all citizens and the relationship of the Muslim community to other communities. The Holy Quran emphasizes the social dimensions of service to Our Creator, for it is on earth and in society that The Creator’s will is to govern and prevail. Similarly, as The Creator had sent His Prophets and revelation to the Jews and Christians, He declares in the Holy Quran that the Muslims now constitute a new community of believers who are to be an example to other nations.

There is no doubt that a central aim of the Holy Quran is to establish a viable social order on earth that will be just and ethically based. There is no such thing as a society less individual. Therefore, within the diversity of states and cultures, Islamic faith and civilization provided an underlying unity, epitomized by a common profession of faith and acceptance of the Shari’ah, Islamic law: Islam provided the basic ideological framework for political and social life, a source of identity, legitimacy and guidance. A sense of continuity with past history and institutions were maintained. (Esposito, Islam the straight path).

The message of Islam was evolutionary in the sense that compared to its predecessors; it was the last and final message to be sent by our Creator. Thus, Prophet Mohammad (SAW)’s message therefore appeals to all of humanity because of the following basic themes laid in the Holy Quran:

1. Islam, the will to freely choosing to obey Our Creator.
2. Iman, seeking the Creator's truth with your mind and intellect.
3. Ihsan, loving our Creator above all else and opening oneself to union with the Almighty through the heart and soul.

Muslims see Prophet Mohammad (SAW) as recapitulating the messages of all the previous Prophets. He manifested the absolute submission and monotheism of Abraham, the dream-interpreting ability of Joseph, the spiritual warrior-kingship of David, the wisdom of Solomon, the law of Moses, and the spirituality of Jesus. He was a Prophet and spiritual guide; a head of state and leader of community, a supreme judge and arbitrator of dispute; reformer of society, a family man, loving husband, and father. He was not devoid of any role and task in society. He was a revolutionary whose ideologies of peace and justice through immense patience and perseverance united tribes, people of diverse religions, sects and social classes under one. There was no division and for those who threatened him, once they became captives of war, there was no persecution. If Islam is to be practiced as Prophet Mohammad (SAW) and his followers had done so under such dire circumstances, there would be no division between Muslims and non-Muslims and that of the West. For, there is no East-West and North-South divisions within religion. There is only humanity as a whole; and if there presently does exist some sort of disparity, it not religion that was the divisive tool, but rather they are the invented institutions of Man.

In accordance with the Holy Quran, Prophet Mohammad (SAW) declared "you are all equal. Nobody has superiority over another except by piety and good action". Hence, in the eyes of Islam, there is no distinction to be made between men, in terms of dignity and rights, on the basis of birth, blood, race, sex, or socio-economic status. Justice and Equity are universally applicable; no one is above Divine law or beyond accountability.

The following are some abiding values clearly articulated by Islam:

1. Unity of the Creator
2. Striving hard and to study to understand the laws of the universe and to unveil and disclose all its secrets Holy Quran (III: 190 & III: 196)
3. Freedom and responsibility, sacrifice, compassion and commitment.
4. Unity of Mankind and universal brotherhood and equality of all human beings before the law.
5. Striving for Justice and collective endeavor to establish justice in society.
6. Stressing distributive justice (XVI: 96). Compassion for the deprived as the rights of the poor.
7. The guarantee to basic rights. To fully act on the commitment of the Shariah in order to establish brotherhood and justice, four essential conditions must be met;
 - i. Fulfillment of the basic needs of the individual.
 - ii. Ensuring a humane and respectable living for all;
 - iii. Equitable distribution of income and wealth; and
 - iv. Growth and stability

Previous Islamic scholars have expounded some other objectives of the Shariah, which are, inter alia:

- a. Protection of Religion (Deen)
- b. Protection of Life (Nafs)
- c. Protection of Progeny (Nasi)
- d. Protection of Property (Mal)
- e. Protection of Reason (Aql)

As summarized, religion and religious practice has never been independent of social consciousness. In fact, the purpose of religion is for humanity as a whole; for a perfect equilibrium upon which society is governed by the universal principles of justice and equality. All religions of the world reflect upon the framework of Politics, Society, Education, marriage and all other remaining Institutions. Thus, one cannot deny that all religions are striving for the advancement of the legal, social and political equality of Man. By this very logic, one who calls himself of a certain faith cannot be devoid of the all encompassing nature of religion and his/her obligation towards it. As reflected through the example of Prophet Mohammad's life and teachings, religion was utilized as a means to heal, educate, enlighten and transform in the spirit of peace. He nurtured peace and good will amongst everyone and preserved the natural environment of that society in that given time period.

Amongst all of the creation that the Creator has created, the Quran reveals that He has made Man the closest to the attributes He possesses; so the center of Man does not mirror but rather reflect attributes such as compassion, love, knowledge and forgiveness. People of all faiths submit because we believe that there exists a divine pattern or scheme of things which is both beautiful, and we wish to find this place in this pattern and conform to it; we cannot do so without instructions—which must be followed meticulously in view of their sacred origin (Eaton, 60). As in fact as all creations of Allah are conditioned to obey him by placing them in this very pattern, only Man has been given the highest authority and the choice of free will. Therefore, we have much more of an obligation to seek the ultimate Truth and Justice.

PROPOSAL FROM THE INSTITUTE OF HAZRAT MOHAMMAD (SAW)

Unfortunately in today's contemporary world, we have seen that there remain sharp contrasts to the practices of Prophet (SAW) and those Muslim minorities whose political ideologies and activities are engrossed in violence. These Islamic groups use their misconstrued understanding of Islam as a means to gain personal, political and economic power. Thus, they resort to violence as a means of attaining these goals. They undermine one of the major focal points of Islam, which repeatedly asks Muslims to bring faith upon all respected Prophets. It is this notion of superiority that these particular groups practice and maintain in an exclusivist manner. It is precisely this approach to religion that has limited people in their understanding and acceptance of other people and their cultures. In a globalized world, where the way the world is changing in terms of emerging nationalities and boundaries and economic power dictates politics, it is essential for religions to unite and resolve the differences of their past.

In order to do so, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam must face this phenomenon together; but in so doing, they must face it also together with Hinduism, Buddhism and the other religions of the world. Secondly, the West must cease reading history from within its own cultural horizons, as it usually does in tracing the origin and development of modernity and post modernity. This means that the task of religions is a double task; to enter creatively into dialogue of religions and to channel their energies into solving the common human problems that threaten our future on this earth. It means that they must strip away negative limiting attitudes towards other religions. They must avoid both a narrow fundamentalism and a bland universalism. They must be true to their spiritual heritage, for this is the source of their power and their gift to the world. They must make every effort to ground themselves in their own traditions and at the same time to open themselves to other traditions. In concert with the other religions they should commit themselves to creating the new complexified global consciousness. Just to meet, even creatively, on the spiritual level is not enough. They must channel their spiritual resources towards the solution of global problems. In doing so, they will find justice and peace, which are human values that must be cherished and pragmatically cultivated.

In correlation for what has been discussed above, the Institute of Hazrat Mohammad (SAW) proposes the following points as a means to rectify the misunderstandings between Islam and the West and to establish mutual understanding for the establishment of Justice and Peace.

(1) Primarily, it must be acknowledged that there is a vast misunderstanding and mistrust between the Islamic States and that of Western States, particularly with the United States and some European Nations. This has seen its beginnings in the involvement of Western States in situations of conflict that has existed and in some cases, still continues to exist in Islamic nations. Whilst examining the underlying root causes for the rise of Islamic Militancy, many scholars attribute its exponential growth to these unresolved conflicts. Examples of unjust intrusions and wars and the killings of Muslims in Afghanistan, Palestine, Iraq, Kashmir, and genocide in Bosnia, are all considered to be issues that Western States are oblivious to. Furthermore, Muslims sentiment regarding the turmoil in Israel/Palestine is that of anger and frustration towards the west for its biasness towards Israel... They feel that the issue could have been resolved long ago had the West been impartial towards Israel.

Muslims view the conflict between Israel and Palestine as one that is imbalanced and biased because it has the unstinted support of the United States and its allies. It feels that the issue would not have sustained had the United States not backed up Israel militarily, politically and financially. Muslims feel that the West should not blindly support Israel; rather, both states should be given their rights and the territorial divide should be made according to justified means, whereby, no state is compromised.

(2) In order to achieve the latter, it would be in the interest of both the West and Muslim nations to have dialogue to gain mutual trust. The West has a

stronger clout on the political discourse and their outcomes. Due to its political and economic superiority, the West should take the initiative to invite Islamic leaders and establish dialogue as a primary initiative towards bridging this gap and towards a foreseeable means of resolving these conflicts and tensions. They should collaboratively strive towards resolving these political conflicts and issues by organizing international conferences, summits, seminars in order for continuous dialogue and solutions of peace. If these are approached with the manner of mutual respect, equality and with the universal attitude of embittering humanity, peace and justice would not just be an ideologies but realities.

(3) Whilst doing so, several crucial issues must be discussed in their agendas. In regards to the issue of nuclear proliferation, the United States and European countries should allow equal opportunities to build nuclear weapons. If and only if, the West disarms itself, does it have the right to dictate the security strategies of other nations. In light of the recent tensions between Iran and United States, Muslims feel that again there lies a huge disparity between the west and Muslim States. The issue becomes only a threat to world security when any Muslim nation or any nations that opposes the United States politically and ideologically (in the case of North Korea), attempts to build nuclear weapons. There should be equal laws regarding the accumulation of nuclear weapons and power.

(4) The concept of globalization should ensure free and fair trade, i.e give a fair export opportunity to developing countries while it is difficult for them to compete with the industrialized nations and/or their products. Developed Countries such as the United States, United Kingdom, Germany, France should give subsidized rates to developing nations, stop subsidizing their own agricultural/industrial products to increase exports of developing nations. Further, globalization should not be restricted to free movement of goods only but be extended to workers from developing or over populated countries.

(5) The pre-conceived notions of Islam and Muslims as backwards should be abolished. There is a tendency for the global media to depict Islam in a very negative connotation. This sort of targeted propaganda has fuelled further misunderstanding, hatred and deceit between both Muslims and non-Muslims. It must be understood that a few isolated events of terrorism or violence cannot be taken out of proportion. The entire Muslim population of 1.4 billion dispersed around the world cannot be blamed for the violence enacted by a few Muslims.

Moreover, the projection of Islam as an oppressive religion and one that subjugates women has to be rectified. The continued demonization of Islamic clerics and leaders opposing women's basic rights are the primary images that are repeatedly portrayed through the media. It must be clarified that the dress code suggested of women in Islam does not subjugate them but rather protects them. As seen through many examples set in Muslim countries, there exist no

set defined dress code for the Muslim women and much of it is a matter of personal choice. The rights of women had been established by the Prophet Mohammad (SAW) long before the West established their laws for women. Thus, it must be deducted, that for a religion that gave civil and property laws to women more than 1400 years ago, it does not intend to oppress half its population comprised of women.

The cultural and religious practices of Islam should not be the focal point of scrutiny. Similar to other cultures and religions of the world, there exists specific practices that may not seem to be accord with the West and its perception of freedom; nonetheless, it is a practice that should be respected.

(6) Lastly, but most importantly, accountability must be given for the unjustified war in Iraq. The United States, United Kingdom and all the other countries that supported United State's invasion of Iraq, resulting in the death of hundreds of thousands of innocent civilians, women and children must not go unaccounted for. It would be grave mistake on the west part to assume this can be buried. Since the United States and United Kingdom defied every international law and the decision of the United Nations and consequently waged war against an already economically sanctioned Iraq, it is essential that the claim that Saddam Hussein had accumulated Weapons of Mass destruction which threatened global security must be proven. Otherwise the war in Iraq would be recorded in history as another atrocity committed unilaterally by the West.

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