

Muslim World and the possibility of connectedness and cooperation



Dr. Abdol Moenim's lecture at Oslo university about the relation with West

The history of relations between the Muslim World and the West started early and dates back to many centuries... there were tensions, interests, invasions, scientific, commercial and cultural ties... thus it is a rich history that we should look at in order to deduce experiences and to stand on evil and goodness for our generations.

Let me assume, what would have happened if we extirpated the impact of the Muslim civilization away from Europe and what would have happened if we did the same with the Muslim world and vice vers?

These close historical ties between Muslim world and west resulted in a complex relation between the two civilizations where there was some admiration, some fear, some animosity and suspicion, and both parties had felt all these.

Let's agree that the process of influencing and being influenced between communities and civilizations is a real process that can not be denounced ... human intellect is naturally an accumulative matter that moves in course of time and some times involuntarily... this intellect was brought by thinkers and scholars from all nations and races...

Logically, we can not claim any civilization that started from the Zero degree yet every civilization becomes established through the heritage from others and through development.

In all the hospitals in Europe we can feel the imprints of Ibn Sina and Razy also the then hospitals were affected by the Greek Packrat, and now we can see the imprints of Ibn Al-Haytham who was the first to discover the velocity of light, also we can feel all the tracks of Plato, Aristotle and Ibn Rushed in philosophy ...you can feel the impacts of Naguib Mahfouz in literature and that of the Norwegian novelist Henrick Ibsnevery one of course has his own features.

Dear honored colleagues, today's world is not that of yesterday, because every thing should be buried and sink in oblivion whether the crusades against the Muslim world or the Islamic conquests.

Thus, we are attempting to make fruitful ties between the Muslim world and the West, so let's prove certain points in order to clear the way:

1- Undoubtedly, there are vast cultural differences that we should consider and respect as a kind of appreciating the pluralism and diversity as a Universal code like that of sun, moon day and night. Therefore life is based on diversity and the Holy Qu'ran says that could be translated as,

“And among His Signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the difference of your languages and colours. Verily, in that are indeed signs for men of sound knowledge.” This diversity and differences in cultures and thinking are great gains for humanity that should be invested in order to achieve progress and development.

2- However the civilizations and cultures differed yet there are common human bases that all agree upon like justice, truth, honor, honesty and all of these exist within the human conscious.

3- Since man is the center of life on earth, he is the one who made civilization through co-operation and participation in course of time, thus, the dialogue between cultures and civilizations should be regarded as a natural state between all human begins...and who ever believes that he possesses the only ideal method for civilization then he/she is wrong.

4- Muslim world is not all the same as well as west , so generalization is a misconception for facts and is a serious one.

Let's overview the history starting from its dawn and how all interactions have taken place in course of time. In the Arab culture we have a proverb says, "history is the storage of lessons...so confrontation between East and West have started since history was written down by man and divided between Mesopotamia and the coasts of the Mediterranean where there were too many events had taken place between East and West yet not recorded before the fourth centuries B.C.

Encounter between East and West started after Alexander the great left the Balkan area moving towards East and he pounded all kingdoms he faced until he reached the end of the Chinese empire then he stopped.

After the Alexandare turned back to Athens cheering his victory, he realized that he is only one turn from history and the change of power balances is incessant that could not only stop to Alexandare ... His turn was not that long because Asian people started to attack the Alexander's armies and defeat them.

In less than one century, Hannibal started to strike the heart of Europe proving fury from the south to north, then Cartage of Alexandria becomes affected with this fury, so the then conflict witnessed another project that was on way on the Italian Rome that is centered in the heart of the Mediterranean. After that the holy Roman empire emerged and the aspirations of Roman started to spawn all the coastal cities looking over the Mediterranean in the first Century. The Roman empire started to invade the mother of Civilizations of Egypt then moves to Levant crossing the Persian civilization and confronting it for a period of seven centuries.

When the Islamic conquests reached the Levant in the seventh century, East was rising to confront West and when the Caesar of Levant was departing the lands he was sure it was a departure and there would be no return and that a new page will be written in history for the Islamic conquests. After that all Western trials to penetrate Asia were doomed to failure through the Dardanelle strait, then Europe started to explode with crusade aspirations when Peter the Monk in the eleventh century sent a message to Orban the second to gather all Europe in huge numbers to launch the famous campaign known as the Crusades. Another confrontations start between East and West took two hundred years where the West focused on invading certain places like Ar-Ruha, and Domyatt however East started to uprise... Europe after that resumed the history of confrontation when a naval revolution took place from the Iberian peninsula that swept Andalusia and encircled the coast lining the Muslim World at the same time France invaded the Egyptian coasts at the time of Napoleon who sparkled the first sign of a new epoch of Western colonization against the East.

In the nineteenth century, the European armies started to sieze the remainder of the sick Muslim World in a new imperialistic movement that did not stop until it pounded every place in the Muslim World.

East started to organize liberalization movements that succeeded in attaining independence however with a new plan where there are no more united East, yet still keeps in memory the non-extinguished hopes of united East.

The twentieth century witnessed two world wars that shaped a new image for the new world and proves day after day that solving conflicts through wars is an international taboo and all people should sit on the table of negotiations to fulfill their hopes without resort to power.

This is a quick scope of view on history and I guess you know this better than me I just summarized it to be etched in your mind during this meeting.

How would be then the relations between East and West? Will the bloody history that was written through historical aspirations continue? Or will man listen to mind and believe that the time of wars baptized by blood should wane away and dialogue should take place?

Unfortunately, philosophers of death deduce from news what could prove the clash of civilizations because some of them still believe thnat dialogue with Islam is something ridiculous and it does not exist in history and man should choose the mad way of blood./

Did man deduce from the past that the concept of clash of civilizations means the continuity of madness because it is the road of destruction and brute acts, and even if the language of power is still superior yet it is shaking at the end and the turns of history will never stop.

From more than one decade, the American national security secretary Zbingo Prigensky said that the society is indulging in pleasures can never offer to the world moral values!!

Unfortunately, life in West became connected and featured with the brutality of capitalism, and the necessity of establishing markets throughout the world and the establishment of multi-national companies and exaggerating in protecting them even if this required a military invasion... finally, forcing countries to join the GATT agreement that will give all gains to the more developed countries on the expenses of the less developed ones.... Through resorting to threats and terrorism if any one refused to join the coalition post 11-9 and we have examples in Afghanistan's crises and the dead silence before the Israeli brute acts perpetrated against Palestinians.

Undoubtedly, the ties between the Muslim World and the West is linked with the basic political issues like the Palestinian cause and the stances adopted by west towards the Israeli-Arab conflict and the Iraqi issue beside the Anglo-American invasion to Iraq, and the potential scenarios policy makers are debating about and calling for radical changes in the region beside threatening Iran and Syria.

It seems that there is a difference between the stances of Europe and USA against the Muslim world. This was evident prior to Iraq's invasion, where many European countries had different stances, this is described by Americans as "Old Europe and Modern Europe" . European west supported the Zionist ideology because it was competing with the Ottoman Empire and in order to weaken its power and ease its gripe away from Asia Minor. Nowadays, there are trials to plant the seeds of hostility among the new generations towards Arabs and the Muslim world through depicting Arab and Muslims in a brute image...and not to speak about the dead silence against the Israeli atrocities.

The events of 11-9 planted fear everywhere that changed into new investments against the so-called "terrorism" that costs annually 400 billion dollars. This shadowy terrorism is evasive and does not submit to any international law, and not to speak of course about "the state's terrorism" which causes in grave losses and casualties beside destroying the infrastructure and developments.

Dear gentlemen

The autocratic governance and the weak development led to severing relations between East and West, because this led to a huge gap between the balances of powers. This facilitated to the stronger West to handle tyrannically the issues of Muslim World. Besides, the huge development gap feeds all feelings of prejudice and marginalization and the result is spoiled East-West ties.

Deteriorating conditions in the Muslim world resulted from autocratic governance forced Muslim countries to count on all western economic aids and some times military ones, and the result that Muslim countries became

submissive to West and submit to western interests, so countries bargain for independence and sacrifices vital interests. This division and conflict led to utter chaos in Muslim World.

All development projects failed in the Muslim world and in return all development projects in the West succeeded in establishing the Western civilization. Clash between civilizations increased and West is trying to practice pressures over Muslim World to make it submit to the concept of power not to the concept of logic. Debates about the feasibility of civilization opposition started to take place as well as the issues of integration in development western projects to attain the necessary development. Thus, the debate about development and civilization scope started to surface in order to draw new correlations between the two scopes.

We can say that the choice of civilization opposition is a legitimate choice that does not need a manifesto from the Islamic school because resisting the aggression and invasion is a human choice that is not in need for legitimization because it is imposed in accordance to circumstances and conditions. If these conditions are to be prone to change, inevitably, they will affect the nature of the self-civilization choice. The resistance can vary between comprehensive opposition to partial one or to a natural state of dialogue and interaction that is based on mutual reliance and dialogue and the later is that we hope and look to.

Islam is not only a religion and creed yet it is a full view for life and it is a communal project that shapes the comprehensive social values. Islam defends the cultural pluralism that's why it succeeded and prevailed since it does not impose one cultural system on people.

These values that Islam brought do not contradict with human and universal however Islam uses these values to build on, Ghandy said, " I want all the cultures of the world to blow like a wind freely near my home if possible but not to topple me from the fierce wind."

Since the history of man kind dates back to thousands of years, then it is important to look at logic relativism for history and to detect the "cosmology" which is an extension in place and time.

It is time to remember that under one of the military confrontation between East and West, There were scientific ties between the Muslim world and the Byzantine empire that stemmed out of the ancient Greek civilization where there was an unprecedented and peerless cultural interaction led to the translation of the whole Philosophical, medical and scientific Greek legacy into the Arabic language. This interaction lasted for not less than three centuries where Europe was about to forget the Greek legacy which moved to the Arab world.

The rapprochement between civilizations as many conditions; it is worthy to mention that the interaction between East and West took place in Two epochs, the first was during the eighth and ninth centuries with Byzantine that stemmed of the ancient Greek civilization, and the other was during the twelfth and thirteenth century with Western Europe, and this one was a unique one that never occurred before even among the Chinese and Japanese interactions. It is necessary today to adopt the trend of interaction between Islam and West in order to meet the targets of rapprochement.

In this aspect, the West should continue its fruitful intellectual activities in order to understand Islam and to continue the efforts of orientalists that started at the beginning of the modern age which helped them to get acquainted with the treasures of the Muslim civilization. Islam and west met face to face in Andalusia and it was a positive interaction relatively.

Intellectual dialogue between philosophers, scientists, and historians about the emergence of civilizations and the reasons that led to flourishing and collapse was encountered by another concept known as "the clash of civilizations" propounded by Fukayama's "End of History", Bernard Lweis's "Crisis of Islam", and Samuel Huntington's "clash of civilizations" and what fueled the concept the occurrence of the events of 11th-9 and some linked between terrorism and Islam also many calls emerged calling people to practice hostility against Arabs and Muslims, and this is not in the favor of any one because Islam did will not defeat West and West will not defeat Islam, and there is no other way out from this clash unless through dialogue and cultural interaction to accept the other.

The Clash between Islam and West is not a clash between Christianity and Islam however it is a clash between the superior colonial thinking.

Undoubtedly, Islam according to West is a kind of confrontation through its system of values that were capable to survive along centuries of ups and downs, because Islam's perception for universe, man and metaphysics along with its legislative system are greatly coherent so it is the great challenge for the Western example in order to fulfill its dream in attaining the end of history. As long as the desire to reach the end of history increases, the desire to defeat Muslim world culturally increases and all efforts are exerted in order to seize recognition from the Muslim world for submission to the Western center.

Despite the deterioration spawning throughout the Muslim world and the fierce attacking campaign yet Islam is still fulfilling gains and many people still embrace Islam. Islam is just in need for freedom, now embracing Islam in west became a propounded issue as a cultural component in the free communities . Thus these communities would never think in extirpating Islam as it is related to a western population base and it lost its image as a newcomer, for example Islam in France is no longer a Moroccan one and in Germany it is no longer Turkish and in Britain it is no longer Pakistani... and so on.

It is no stange to see the issue of containing Islam, normalizing it with western values became a persistent matter knocking the western mind. For example a head scarf of one student may flare a problem and fears and recalls back the darkest image in the western history which is the religious and sectarian –western–western wars. In Britain, it failed to contain Catholics, as well as Ireland and France that failed to contain Protestants.

Undoubtedly, there is a religious, moral and human responsibility that should be assumed by Muslims in order to correct the image of Islam in West beside the approaches propounded to co-exist with the Muslim world and the human cooperation between Islam and West based on a common political economic intellectual ground. Phases of co-existence known to all different people that occurred in the golden age of Islam let to the formation of a harmonious human civilization where all men contributed to whether Muslim, Christian or Jew... this harmony existed in Andalusia.

The relation between the direct present-day political interests and the civil views are complex matters that should be taken into consideration. So, it is not sufficient to draw a huge image for disputes between Islam and West through recalling one event from history like that of crusades to generalize this relation, also it is not sufficient to stand on one aspect from the aspects of relations.

Dear Gentlemen:

After the collapse of USSR, the relations between East and West became more complex and specifically after 11-9 events and Islam became charged with all aspects of terrorism. So the character of a terrorist is attributed to every Arab and Muslim. After 11/9 the American administrations gave justifications to launch deadly attacks against Islam and Muslims under the pretext of combating terrorism, and according to the views that Islam harbor terrorism and terrorists.

We still assure people that Islam never accepted such means, and what some Muslims perpetrated from terrorist attacks does not indicate that all Muslims are violent. If we used the same policy in generalizing that the Muslim world is a violent one then we can find some organizations in West as well that kill people in Europe and America.

Justice in evaluating matters requires accuracy in studying the charges and the whereases like in the legal lexicon. Thus, we believe that the western rhetoric about Islam as a religion calls for terrorism is unfair and unjustified, and is not accordant to any religious logic.

We as Muslims are looking for the friendship with the world, differentiate between western governments and western people, and we have noticed that many people demonstrated against the war launched by the American Administration in Iraq and Afghanistan.

There is no any problem at all with Islam and West and if we differed in some aspects then dialogue is the solution as Islam taught us.

There are so many westerns living in Muslim countries and no body ever tried to attack them but rarely and in return we can find millions of Muslims living in west and intermingled with westerns normally.

There are extremist Muslims as well as in west, are there no racial causes that occurred in west against strangers despite that we do not say that West is fanatic because there are fanatic Muslims. There is a verse from Qur'an that says, " The good deed and the evil deed are not alike. Repel the evil deed with one which is better, then lo! he, between whom and thee there was enmity (will become) as though he was a bosom friend." Fussilat 34

This verse addresses Jews and Christians as well, because Islam recognized Jews and Christians and co-existed with them. Islam recognizes the other and co-exists with him/her and believes in dialogue and power should not be used at all.

We assume that Europe is well prepared to be more human with the Muslim world and we are prepared to the open door policy with west and we believe that Europe is more aware of the Palestinian cause because it expressed moderate stances. Muslim world now bears no complex against west because the era of colonization waned away and we know that west has interests in the Arab and Muslim world, so we need from west to respect our interests in order to establish strong ties based on mutual benefits. It is not true that Islam is against west however it is against some western policies and this does not indicate hostility exactly like west which recognizes democracy and recognizes opposition. An according to Islam, we are not against Jews because they lived among us for 14th century and we did not practice any kinds of persecutions against them like others did.

The ongoing fierce campaign against Islam started to take an international dimension exceeding the cultural scope to the political scope. The extent of attacking Islam is escalating on the Arab and Muslim issues. I am afraid to say that we are before a political war that targets the cultural and intellectual identity of Islam and this war extends to political confrontations where there are libeling for Islamic concepts through the emergence of a certain category

among Muslims who believe in violence even if the matter was for self-defense. While we see an Israeli excessive exploitation for the persecution against Jews in Europe, there is an escalating aggression against Arabs and Muslims (which is an Anti-Semitism) because we are culturally and historically Semitic. Israel is the great anti-Semitic because it never stops attacking Arabs and Muslims through planting the seeds of sedition in the region and through its atrocities that never stop against Arabs.

Muslims contained Christians and Jews in their extended history ... and this is a white page in our history.

West should understand the reality of Islam and should understand that it is not a religion of Terrorism as some people believe but it is a religion that contains universal and human values that respect human life fraternity and mercy among all human kind. Universal human values are common in the three divine religions however Islam developed these values.

We should re-correct the confused vies in the western public opinions when it links Islam with terrorism although it is a religion of mercy and justice while all crimes perpetrated by some Muslims does not mean generalization.

Being unaware of Islamic values in west hampers the dialogue between Islamic and Western civilization, west should see the real image of Islam, that tolerant Islam, the mercy to mankind, Islam respects all divine legislations and non-divine one. Unfortunately, the waves of eliminating holiness in modern and post-modern spread greatly and this holiness is what Islam keeps and preserves.

The concept of holiness is a main nutrition for souls

Dear gentlemen:

I would like to conclude with a verse from the Qur'an that asserts the connectedness between civilizations, it says, "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 13

This knowledge is the exchange of cultures and this can not be from one side yet it needs the cooperation between both sides and this kind of connectedness would bind man to his fellow man with love and respect regardless of differences



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