Islam and the West

I. Introduction

In the name of Allah, the most Merciful, the most Compassionate
From Muhammad, Messenger of Allah to Heraclius, the Chief of Rome

"Peace on him who follows the guidance, I invite you to the call of Islam. If you submit you will enjoy safety and Allah will grant you a double recompense. But if you turn your back, the sin of you r subjects will be on you."

"O ye the people of the book! come to a saying (Kalimah) which is the same for us and for you: that we worship none but Allah, what we associate to partners with Him and what we erect not, from among ourselves, Lords and patrons other than Allah. If then they turn back, say ye: "Bear witness that (at least) we are Muslims."

The relationship between Islam and the west started in the 6th year of Hijrah (628 A.D) when the Prophet Muhammad BPUH sent his companion to the Eastern Roman Emperor, Heraclius, with the letter quoted above. This soon turned into a confrontation which, despite certain exceptions, has characterized his unbroken relationship which is now more than fourteen hundred years old. This long relationship of Islam and the West is not merely a story of unending wars, lack of mutual trust and economic exploitation. It has also produced fruitful economic and intellectual exchange. This relationship has influenced some of the best work of literature. But on the whole, the nature of relationship remained confrontational to this day. There are religious as well as political reasons for this.

Within a century after the migration from Makkah, Muslims had extended their empire from China to France. However these extra ordinary victories were not primarily due to the power of the sword; the real force behind was the inherently attractive message of Islam which the Christian West was, by far and large, unable to comprehend. During the initial phase of relationship between Islam and the West, the West saw Muslims and Islam as aggressors, though this perception was not as crystal clear as it became in the subsequent centuries. It was negative image of Islam and Muslims which helped, at least in part, to muster popular support for the crusaders in the eleventh century. Towards the end of the first century of Islam, there arose opportunity in al-Andalus which could have provided a chance for the Christian world to understand Islam through shared living experiences. But unfortunately Muslim Spain became a fertile place for the learned Christian circles of medieval Europe to cull the most barbaric images of Islam and its Prophet PBUH.

II. Muslims and the West in History

- a. Long chequered history of frequent tension, acute rivalry, armed conflict, military alliances across religious lines
- b. Peaceful cultural exchange
- c. No fundamental differences

- d. Common Abrahamic Origin
- e. Holy Quran and the Bible
- f. God and Nature 191
- g. Orientalism: Its Evolution and Problems
- h. Islam and Christianity attach great moral value to the alleviation of suffering

III. Western Perception of Islam and the Muslims

On the theological plane, Islam was generally not perceived as a genuine religion by the Christian West, just as Christianity was not accepted as a genuine religion by the Jews. This lack of acceptance was soon mixed with a fear which arose from the rapid expansion of the geographical boundaries of the Muslim world. Had Islam remained confined to Arabia, the Christian West would have had little reason to worry, perhaps in a limited circle there would have been apprehensions about its teachings. But he early victories of the Muslim armies and the remarkable speed with which these were accomplished, produced fear, suspicion and hatred and stamped an initial image of Islam on the Western psyche as a religion of fire and sword, an image which has now survived more than fourteen hundred years.

- a. Islam continue to be the subject of ridicule and scorn by West
- b. Sources of the problem
- c. Historical Legacy: the Crusades
- d. Western Writing on Islam and Muslims
- e. Differing Views on the Role of Religions in Society
- f. Western thoughts vs. Islamic Thought
- g. Mutual refusal to recognize the fundamental doctrines
- h. Distorted Image
- i. Misconceptions
- j. Negative Representation

V. Islamism: A Designer Ideology for Resistance, Change and Empowerment

Islam with all its comprehensiveness, wholeness and balance is absent from the arena, a stranger in its homelands, denied by its people. It is served for governance and legislation, from guiding public life in matters of state whether political, economic or pertaining to other internal or external relations. It has been decreed by the West that Islam should become a replica of Christianity in its age decline, a dogma without legislation, a form of worship without practice, a religion without a state, a Quran without authority (Sultan).

- a. Fundamentalism: a catchall term for depicting all Muslims
- b. West: failed to provide a model effective for Islamic societies
- c. Economic Control of Resources to achieve industrialization
- d. Islamist groups are focused on the spiritual goals of Islam
- e. External efforts to utilize racial, ethnic, national and linguistic differences among Islamic Ummah
- f. Islamism: the continuing process of de-colonization
- g. Islamism: a reactive not a reactionary movement

- h. Islamism is a quest for empowerment, addressing political concerns and removal of oppressive rulers

VI. 21st century: Islam and the West

European and American academics labouring hard to invent and present a new imaginary global enemy to take the place of the fallen Communist foe. They have close ties to policymakers in the West and since policymakers welcome reasons not to change the bipolar paradigm of the past fifty years. The propagation of misunderstanding and misinformation and the distortion of he image of Islam and he Muslims, is today taking place at he hands of the Western media and on an unprecedented scale. Most representatives of the western media and those consulted by them as "experts" on Islam seem to have inherited and perfected the hostile role of the authors, who popularized the absurd and ugly image of Muslims in earlier times."

- a. Relations after Cold War
- b. Huntington's "Clash of Civilizations" between the West on the one side, and Islamic world (and Confucian states) on the other.
- c. New world order
- d. Democracy: Islamic and Western Perception
- e. Neo colonialism
- f. War on terror or War against Muslims?
- g. Oil politics
- h. Muslims Entangled by Economic Policies of West
- i. Backwardness of the Muslim World in Science and Technology
- j. CNN-ization of the world (concern over death of Christians and Jews but not at all over Muslims)
- k. Imbalanced and inaccurate portrayal of Islam and the Muslims by the Western Media
- l. Exaggeration of Muslim actions as extremist or terrorist acts.

VI. How to Remove Ambiguities between Islam and the West?

With the United States' assumption of the leadership of the Western world and its rise as a superpower after the Second Word War, a new disruptive element has shadowed the West's relations with the Muslims. This has been the United States' "passionate attachment" to Israel. This State was imposed on the Muslim world by force in a process that resulted not only in the loss of life, but also in the homelessness, oppression, misery and loss of the basic human rights of millions of Palestinians.

There are the cases of, for instance, the Palestinians, the Kashmiris, the Filipino, Bosnian, Chechen, Kosovan and Myanmar Muslims who have suffered untold atrocities. Muslims ask, "Had the majority of these people been Christian or Jews, would the West not have rushed to their defense? Are the rights of Muslims seen as less worthy of concern than those of Western Christians?

- a. End of Israel's blind support by the West
- b. Genuine coexistence and cooperation
- c. The Future: Prospects and Challenges
- d. Dynamic Islamic cultural revival
- e. Partnership and Harmony for the good of Muslims and the West and the rest of humankind
- f. Lesson from the past: avoid repeating mistakes
- g. Cooperation not confrontation
- h. Improving Muslim-Christian relations by dialogue
- i. Redress for wrong done to Muslim Ummah
- j. Widening personal contacts between Muslims and Westerners
- k. Peaceful solution of the issues of Kashmir, Afghanistan, Iraq, Palestine etc
- l. Mutual respect, safeguarded rights, Justice—social, economic and political
- m. West's selective, hypocritical and biased support, based on self interest and ancient animosity should by ended
- n. Shedding Conventional Prejudices

VII. Conclusion