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## **The Direction of the Muslim Umma After September 11, 2001 and Occupation of Iraq**

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A primary question imposes itself: Do Muslims actually represent an umma in the contemporary world?

What is meant by the question is not the umma as known in the political geography as nation and recognized by the international law, but the umma is meant here as a concept of universal communal based on self awareness of the concerned entity about its identity on one side, and the acceptance of the distinctive identity of the Muslim universal community by the entire world on the other side.

Muslims are supposed to be a doctrinal or ideological universal community, united through the entire world by their faith, thinking, feelings and action. They all believe in, and they are all committed to: Islam and its values of doing the good and spreading it, wherever they exist throughout the entire world.

However, the concrete reality is that such natural barriers: geographic and ethnic, in addition to political, economical and cultural barriers under colonialism and in the post-colonial period, have obstructed the supposed unity of the umma, and the reflections and interactions through its one body. Instead of such healthy integrity, each part deals with its needs and interests on its own, and the supposed unity has to retreat and become merely emotional, formal, and even symbolic.

Nevertheless, challenges and dangers which Islam and Muslims have been facing in the contemporary world ought to revitalize the awareness of unity and integrity of the Muslim universal communal body. Fierce attacks against Islam as a religion have unceasingly and shamelessly followed the horrible events of September 11, 2001 in the US. The US actions of intimidation and sometimes humiliation have continued against Muslims: individuals, group or states, which have been culminated in the occupation of Afghanistan, in 2001 and Iraq in 2003. Would the successive challenges and dangers reactivate the body of the Muslim umma and mobilize its suspended and disrupted abilities, or they would make it more and disunited?

From another angle, the entire world is witnessing an era of globalism, through its speedy mass communications and transportation, which have been going beyond imagination, with all its positives and negatives. It may be an opportunity for the Muslims to surmount the barriers and to regain same kind of unity, at least in their feelings and thinking. The negatives of such a globalism may add to the challenges, which they have to face together, and the unity and solidarity may be within the limited effective armament that Muslims may have in the contemporary world.

## How May The Muslim Umma Represent a Universal Community?

By nature, the human being is inclined to act as an individual and assure his/her ego. Family relations may often represent a bio-psychological extension of the individual person. Going beyond the ego requires psycho-intellectual individual and social efforts, especially if the pursued entity is moral not material, doctrinal or ideological not geographical or ethnical. Apprehending the idea in mind does not mean that it has become at hand, and should not confuse us about the long way, which we have to go through in order to reach the goal.

Early Arab Muslims could be transferred from their tribalism to a united umma for they lived in a particular geographic area, spoke a common language, and had much in common in their life, then the message of Islam came out and provided them with the moral and conceptual motivation to be united around, and thus became one umma in a homogenous material and cultural environment which helped them in this direction. Unity brought power and prosperity to early Muslim Arabs, and didn't confront them with unbearable risk:

“And the remember the time when you were few (and) oppressed on earth, fearful lest people should snatch you, where upon He sheltered you might be grateful”

(Al-Anfaal: 26):

“God has promised those of you who have attained to faith and do righteous deeds that He will certainly cause them to accede to it, and that he will certainly establish for them firmly the religion with which He was pleased to bestow, and that He will certainly cause their erstwhile state of fear to be replaced by security, as they worship Me (alone), not associating any with me”

(An-Nur: 55)

When early Arab Muslims went beyond their geographic and ethnic confines, the political unity of the caliphate under one central authority could not survive long, and the Muslim umma was split between caliphates and autonomous ruling dynasties, a split which has natural its unfavorable impact on the unity of the umma. A realistic vision of the universal framework of the Muslim community is an essential as the aspiration of unity themselves.

Practically speaking, Muslims have been living for centuries weak and disunited, materially and morally. However, the contemporary shocks should urge them to reflect on their state in order to figure out the factors behind it, especially the responsibility of Muslims themselves in bringing about such a state not always blaming others for what they suffer, and the required efforts to get out of it and to avoid future weakness and disunity:

“Verify, God does not change humans' conditions unless they change their own selves.”

(Ar-Rad: 11 )

Feeling hopeless and helpless constantly means that we don't think; thinking is a sign of life, rejection and resistance of our weakness and failures, while yielding to them develop insensitivity and indifference and makes our sufferings more grave and most likely fatal. Thinking is the inevitable result of active feeling, and the primary requirement for positive action. A domination of a single world-power would tempt it to manipulate the contemporary globalism for its interests, and Muslims cannot stay passive relying on an expected competition and balance in the world as it happened before. Muslims have to rely on their ownelves not on a dreamed mechanical equilibrium, which may leave them alone or allow them a margin of mere existence. The contemporary world is very dangerous for the weak to live in. Unity is an available way in this world jungle to be unswallowable, and constructive engagement in the universal village is necessary for survival since isolation may allow the victimization of the isolated in a way or another, Muslims should have their

own way as a universal communal unity in interacting with the entire world in this era of globalism and working hard together and with others for benefiting from the positives and defending themselves against the negatives. Such a challenge and responsibility, should require Muslims to feel as an umma, to think as an umma and to act as an umma, within themselves and with others through the entire world.

### Feeling as One Umma

We have to feel genuinely as one umma in a rational, mature and well-organized way, so that our relationships work together in coordination and harmony within ourselves and with the entire world. Muslims do not live in a vacuum; they are living in a world full of peoples with all their various backgrounds, interests and inter-relations. An umma consciousness ought not to engulf nor negate the other Muslim existential relations in the contemporary world. Islam being the message of “the Lord of the whole universe and all beings (Rabb al Alamin)” to all humans in the whole world - allows and urges constructive natural relations between Muslims and whoever human beings they come across for whatever legitimate purpose that may come out according to the Islamic universal values. Consequently, Muslims’ feelings and relations with particular lands “the homes which you feel pleased with a particular people within which you find “your fathers. children. brothers and sisters. spouses and clana” particular material interest in “the worldly goods which you have acquired and the commerce where of you fear a decline,” (At-Taubah: 24) are natural and lawful according to the Quran, as long as they are conducted in compliance with and not conflicting with the Islamic directions. A homeland and its people merely represent an extended home, neighbourhood an family, in which a relationship is natural and legitimate. Muslims have always been related in their names to their cities, countries, peoples, geographic and ethnic, professional associations and any other natural and legitimate grouping, and be accordingly involved in and supporting in such entities. Through Islam, Muslims make the best of their potential abilities in their various relations with regard to their range and width, continuity and strength, and do not feel any obstruction for them. The identity of the Muslims individual, group, and umma can be perceived and universally recognized through moral and ethical interaction, through truthfulness, honesty and helpfulness rather than through proaching, talking and publishing and publishing about the faith and acts of worship.

Do Muslims genuinely feel that they are an umma of conscience, virtues and good deeds, and their message to the world is to spread what is good (al-Khasur) and enjoin what is favorable for the human nature and common sense (al mara) and forbid what is rejectable by the human nature and common sense (al munkar), not to repeat certain words and practice certain rituals?

“And let it be from among you a community which invites to all that is good, and enjoins the doing of what right and favorable, (for the human nature and common sense), and forbids the doing of what is wrong and rejectable (by the human nature and common sense). and it is they who attain to happiness and success”

(Al-Imran: 104)

. “True goodness and virtue does not consist in turning faces towards the east or the west. but truly good and virtuous is the one who believes in God and the last Day and the angels and the divine book and the prophets, and spends his/her substance-however much he/she himself/herself may cherish it on the near of kin, and the orphans. and the needy and the way-farer (who cannot return home), and those who ask for help, and for the freeing of human beings from bondage, and keeps up prayer, and renders the purifying (social welfare) dues; and (truly good and virtuous are) they who keep their promises whenever their promise, and are patient in adversity and hardship and in time of peril: it is they who have proved themselves true, and it they who are truly conscious of God”

(Al-Baqarah: 177)

Besides, it is essential for the universal Muslim umma to feel its diversity within unity and to feel the diversity of humanity, and to be always conscious of and sensitive to the particularities and characteristics of the various components of the umma, and of the various components of the world. Dealing with “the other” is the cornerstone in human relations, “the other” in gender, in ethnicity, in country belonging, in faith and in the other acquired earnings, material or intellectual. Such differences are enriching when there is human complementation and cooperation within the Muslim umma and with others all over the world:

“And among His wonders is the creation of the heavens and earth, and the diversity of your tongues and colors; and in this there are signs and messages for all who have knowledge. “

(Ar-Ruum: 22)

“O human beings! We have created you all out of a male and a female, and have made you into nations and tribes, so that you might come to know and recognize one another”

(Al-Hujuraat: 13)

The Muslim umma has to represent the embracing providence of the Lord of all beings (Rabb al-Alamin) in dealing with all beings. Besides, the universal Muslim umma has to feel the qualitative material and socio-cultural changes in the contemporary world, and the dynamism of the message of Islam and its law - as the final divine message according to the Muslim believe - in dealing with the variables through the invaluable divine gift of the human mind and the practice of intellectual inference and judgement (ijtihad) in its widest sense. The even of the past developed through certain given circumstances of past, from which the circumstances of our contemporary world are qualitatively different. The Islamic thinking has proved through history a fascinating dynamism in interacting with the continuous changes of time and place over successive centuries and extensive lands, such a merit is essentially required now and has to be renewed.

### Thinking as One Umma

The Muslim universal umma has to think about the spiritual, intellectual and material needs in the contemporary world, in the light of the permanent guidance of the Quran and Sunna. Human rights, in all their dimensions, represent global essential in the contemporary universal thinking. God’s messages - terminated by Islam - have come to direct human beings towards worshipping the One God alone so that they might not - directly or indirectly - worship one another, or waste their distinctive abilities in submission to false gods and superstition:

“That we worship none but God, and we never associate any with Him. and that we do not take human beings from among us as our lords besides God. “

(Al-Imraan: 64)

The creator has conferred dignity in its comprehensive sense on all human beings since of the creation of the human species:

“We have conferred dignity on all children of Adam, and have born them over land and sea, and have provided for them sustenance out of the good things of life and favored them far above most of our creation” (Al-Israa: 70).

Muslims have to secure and defend human dignity within the whole umma and through the entire world, so that God’s justice prevails, and any party that commits aggression...

“Reverts to God’s commandments (of justice), and if they revert make peace between the (conflicting) parties with justice, and deal equitably with them both, for verily, and God loves those who act equitably”

(Al-Hujuraat: 9).

Human rights should be secured and sanctioned by national and international laws through national and international authorities, and not merely left to the human morality, nicety and kindness, although the human morality is indispensable in supporting and securing the laws effectiveness, and both cannot be split in God’s guidance.

Recognizing and defending the rights of every human being is specifically essential for the “weak” individuals or groups that needs this recognition and defense, such as women, children and all victims of aggression nationally and internationally. Human rights have to be secured by the umma for “the other” who may be related to an ethnic minority or a different religion.

As Muslims demand the security of human rights of Muslim minorities that live among non-Muslims majorities in other countries, the human rights of the non-Muslims who live among Muslim majorities have to be secured; rights pertaining to persons and families, freedom of faith and expression, rights towards state services especially health and education, right of association and assembly, political and socio-economic rights, equality in rights and responsibilities for all citizens and all other human rights should be secured for the non-Muslims who live among muslim majorities. Muslim may have been often nice in dealing with women or non-Muslims, but what is stressed in contemporary times is equality not mere nicety. According to the Quran, “kindness and full equity” are both required in dealing with the non-muslims who leave peacefully’ with the Muslimin the same land and share with them life with all its enjoyments and sufferings.

Human rights should be secured also for the enemies, such as the defendants in their trials and during imprisonment, and the prisoners of war who have to be cared for and set free as soon as the war ends. The Muslim umma has always to defend the human rights wherever they live and through the entire world, and support any victims of aggression or oppression. This is a basic element of the universal mission of the Muslim umma:

“And let be from among you a community which invites to all that is good, and enjoins the doing of what is right and favorable, and forbids the doing of what is wrong and rejectable, and it is they who attain to happiness and success”

(Al-Imraan: 104)

To think as an umma, Muslim specialist in the various fields, (e.g. science and technology, medicine, human and social sciences, law, Islamic studies, literature and art, etc.) have to exchange their knowledge and experience within themselves, and with their colleagues in the entire world. Professional unions and associations should have effective universal interrelations, structural links and meetings to coordinate Muslims efforts through the world and should cooperate with the parallel, regional and international organizations, especially the agencies originated from or affiliated with the United Nations. Muslims have to assure their role in the contemporary civilizations as they assured it through the medieval world. Universities in Muslim countries should have their conferences, joint projects and students exchange in the different areas of specialization, as well as they should have activities with other universities all over the world. The muslim inter-state organization for education, science and culture, ICESCO, has to reflect capably and effeciently how the Muslim umma think, and to provide a strong bridge between the Muslim thinking and the entire contemporary world. active translation between the different languages through the muslim umma, art, expositions, theatre and cinema festivals, books, and other products fairs are fundamental in

connecting the muslim umma intellectually and emotionally and emotionally, and in presenting the contributions of the Muslim umma through parallel universal channels.

Muslim as an umma should practice ijihad, not in the sense of finding partial solutions for emerging partial cases such as certain interest transactions or women's dress or some food or drink, but to have a new comprehensive vision of Shari'a and its goals and objectives and general principles, and of the jurisprudential development and how it has been influence by the changing circumstances of time and place even within the same juristic school, and thus grasp the dynamism of the Islamic law versus change and divergence of social needs, attitudes, interactions an priorities. The earlier Muslim creativity of "usul al-fiqh, fundamentals of jurisprudence" has to be renewed and developed to distinguish and characterize the basics and mechanism of Shari'a, benefiting from contemporary developments in the study of history and and of legal and social sciences. Islamic academic institutions of education and research through the Muslim countries and the entire world are urged to coordinate their efforts in order to bring about a contemporary vision of the dynamic open ended Shari'a. Such a reconstruction or reconstitution would prove its visibility and productivity in such areas as political activities, women's role, economics, arts and in reconstructing the conception and the practically of jihad in the contemporary world.

The Muslim umma has to be constructively engaged in a dialogue with the existing faiths and ideologies through the contemporary world, to know from first class sources how others believe and what they are encountering now among the believers, and to let others know about Islam and muslim in the same way. repeating certain statements and arguments which may have been used to through centuries, and representing Islam or knowing about other religions and arguing fo against a afaith theoretically in isolation from what people really feel or think, might suit previous times of polemics, when those who spoke about a religion could not meet others or did not want to meet them. In our contemporary world direct contacts have become practically and psychologically easier, and the barriers among people have been tumbling down. Direct interfaith dialogue is essential for mutual fruitful understanding and constructive interaction which one completely different from missionary efforts that aim for conversion. Interfaith discussion should deal with the contemporary spiritual, psychological and social problems of the believers in every faith and do not stick only to theology, since many of such problems may be common and not only related to a particular religion, and exchanging knowledge and experiences in such areas would benefit all parties.

#### Acting as One Umma

Muslims' action should support what they feel and think as one umma that lives in the contemporary world, and should respond to the needs an aspirations of the contemporary world with its Muslim and non-Muslim populations. The Quran cares about "the children of Adam" and "the human beings" in their entirety and does not restrict the Muslim concerns to Muslims only, since they commit themselves to the message "Rabb al-Alamin, The Lord of all beings, the all-Merciful and All-Gracious and the Mercy and Grave giving". Muslims as an umma should have their universal constructive efforts within themselves, towards their neighbors, and in the entire world through the regional and universal organizations, whether governmental or non-governmental. They should be the unhesitant supporter of ethnic and religious minorities and all victims or oppression and exploitation whether they are individuals or groups. The Muslim umma has to make the organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) a model for world inter-relations and cooperation, which should embrace an efficient court of inter-state justice and a court for the inter-state complaints about human rights in any Muslims country. It goes without saying that each country with a Muslim majority should be a model for securing and defending human rights through its educational, administrative, legislative and judicial institution.

The Muslim umma has to assure its feelings, and thinking and action through its coordinated media projects, and through effective interaction with the world media. There will definitely be different views as it is expected in any healthy collectivity but their should be prevalent inclusive tone which expresses the basic joiny correlations, needs and aspirations. Constructive involvement with the world media is essential for reciprocal understanding and support. Practical interrelations within the umma and technology, literature and arts. A common market for the Muslim umma would be a concrete evidence of its unity and would provide a forward for it drive. We are rich human and material resources, and a genuine cooperation would accelerate our efforts in the fields of education, training and human and material development.

### Conclusions

The Muslim umma has a long way to go through, in order to assure itself within itself and through the contemporary complex world. Whatever long way starts with a few steps in the right direction. Our religion teaches and trains us to recognize and direct ourselves to the right “qibla, direction” before starting action.

Let us set ourselves as an umma at the right direction with regard to our feelings, thinking, planning and acting, starting from individuals and families and going through groups and reaching the whole umma. Deeds should represent our ideals, since they are the obvious and concrete expression of our identity, beliefs, and concepts. We know that the character of our Prophet was merely a representation of the Quran. The right direction and the right beginning with firm commitment and persistence would put us on the right track to go through the long way and reach our goals “Insyallah”.

Europe which fostered in modern times the ideology of nationalism and the struggle for it, has been able to provide during the recent decades the “Eurocommunity” as an enlightening conceptual and practical model of persistent hard work for unity.

“And say, ‘Act, and God will behold your deeds, and (so will) the Conveyor of His message and the believers, and (in the end) you will be brought before Him who knows all that is beyond the reach of a created being’s perception as well you get the hang of what you have been doing” (At-Taubah: 105)