

Islamic Revolution and the New Islamic World Order

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In order to grasp the full relevance of what is meant by the New Islamic World Order it is necessary at first to have a glance at the current, dominant world order, its rationale, appeal and the challenge it poses to non-Western cultures.

Since at least four centuries ago, a new world system has started emerging, which was at first characterized by vigorous cross-continent commercial activity and the discovery of new geographical horizons. This was ebbed on by the slowly developing technologies and their application in navigation and the military. The Industrial Revolution saw the culmination of this process that in turn gave a huge impetus to imperialism and the subjugation of Eastern as other indigenous people.

Europe was now not only the dominant military and economic power in the world, but it was claimed that it represented the apex of human progress and the arrival-point of the march of human civilization. There we see that the theories and indeed the sentiments about the end of history were current as early as the mid-19th century.

Europe was considered the center of the world and this had deep ramifications in the geographical, historical and intellectual spheres. Geographically all regions of the world were to be considered as to their geographical position in relation to Europe. Thus the terms the Near East, the Middle and the Far East were invented.

Human history was divided into Antiquity, the Middle Ages and the Modern era. All human scientific and intellectual outputs were to be judged according to the standards of positivism and Western rationalism. Those that did not qualify were relegated to the category of pre-objective discourse. Hence, it was claimed that the East had something to offer in the realm of ethics, spirituality, poetry and legend but certainly every little in the

knowledge and thought which contributed to progress or the proper management of social, political and economic affairs.

The legalistic framework for this world was international law, which was nothing but a balance-sheet for the balance of power. Its logic was viciously simple enough. We, the West, are the dominant power and we have every right to chart and enact laws, which see to the upkeep of our strategic and economic interests. It is needless to say that the maintenance of such interests often meant the colonization of countries for their natural resources, markets and cheap labor. A subsidiary process, no less harmful was arbitrary introduction of Western cultural values and lifestyle. Anyone who sought to protest or rise up against this oppression was not—it was claimed—up to the standards of international conduct and civilized behavior and therefore should be brought into submission. The focal point of this world order shifted to the United States of America especially after the Second World War.

The first serious challenge to this system was the establishment of the Soviet Union after the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 that brought into question the hegemonic nature of the capitalist apparatus that resulted in immense exploitation at home and imperialist venture abroad. This ideology was appealing to many a Third World people and, at times, militarily menacing to the West. However, belonging to the West's intellectual and philosophical traditions and because of its own internal contradictions, the West was able to isolate, contain and later destroy it as a political entity.

Such were the general conditions when Imām Khomeinī returned triumphantly to Iran in February of 1979. Within months of the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran it became known to the whole world that this man wanted nothing less than the establishment of a divine order first at home and then, by example, in all Muslim countries. What is meant by this Islamic World Order is to rejuvenate a worldwide system, some of the basic components of which had been dormant for centuries, with the aim of making the divine precepts the stimulation and guiding lines for cultural, political and economic affairs. It had the ambitious claim that in a postmodern world characterized by material progress but existential problems in terms of alienation, identity crisis and loss of meaning; religion would have the answers and the solutions if it were to take charge of human affairs. For the outside world it meant bringing into question and indeed challenging the legitimacy or, more appropriately, the legality of the dominant world order, especially when it came to the issue of trampling upon the rights of the Muslim people, or the advocacy of policies, agreements and activities injurious toward their economic interests or derogatory toward their

ideals and principles. It—the New Islamic World Order—implied crossing the redlines demarcated by international arrogance in order to perpetuate their dominance and oppression.

Both the targets for the call of the establishment of this divine order and the vehicles for its implementation were the worldwide Muslims, the *ummah*, whose underlying spiritual and moral principles were dear to their hearts. So cataclysmic and emotive had been the response of the Muslims for the rejuvenation of this scared order that it reminded them and others familiar with Islamic history of that first great Islamic Revolution instituted by Prophet Muḥammad (ṣ): “*O ye who believe; Obey Allah, and the messenger when He calleth you to that which quickeneth you.*”¹ And again: “And We sent a messenger to you to revive the remembrance of you.” Also in the traditions of the Infallibles (‘a): “In such admonition, he makes manifest the secrets of the intellects.” And in the words of the Great Leader of the Islamic Republic, Āyatullāh Sayyid ‘Alī Khāmene’ī: “We were dead and then the Imām (Khomeinī) brought us to life again.”

Indeed this new life breathed into the *ummah* by the late Imām and the preoccupation of the world media with Islam and Muslims had been perhaps the most defining feature of world culture in the last two decades of the twentieth century. The most identifiable manifestations of this sacred order was the almost universal endeavor by the world Muslims to establish Islamic governments and be ruled by divine laws; a huge social transformation in terms of societal and gender relations; and a humane economic order in terms of shunning usury, and selfless charitable work for the sake of the needy, orphans and the disadvantaged. Of no less importance was the reassertion of cultural values and an increasing confidence to offer opinions and views in matters of intellectual, philosophical and artistic nature on a global sphere. This was to give impetus to religious people of other faiths as well.

This sacred order demonstrated that it is the only system able to stand up to the dominant Western world order while all other system and, indeed, cultures would falter sooner or later.

The Western culture on which the dominant world order draws has a series of features, which include economic prosperity, freedom in human and especially gender relationships, and democracy. These characteristics are defined by the concept of the pursuit of happiness, a notion which embodies the soul of Western culture.

¹ *Sūrah al-Anfāl* 8:24. [Trans.]

These features are immensely attractive to many non-Western people, especially the younger generation, and they are communicated through a variety of images, role models and fantasies. In order to withstand the corrosive influence of this culture and its totalizing process, non-Western people and some non-Western governments try to resurrect their indigenous cultural heritage and other nationalistic sentiments so that they may act as barrier against this flood which is carried through consumerism, television and travel. The crucial point here is that history and experience have shown that if these indigenous cultures are not built on the edifies of *tawhīd* they will collapse sooner or later.

The basic domain of influence of Western culture is *nafs*,¹ not the mental faculty. Its basic domain is that of whims, passions, emotions, and caprices. Even when it appeals to reason it does so through the channel of emotion and feeling. It presents itself more as a lifestyle and mode of contentment rather than an intellectual system that a person might accept or reject out of conviction. It is aptly named by an Iranian scholar as the ‘Culture of the *Nafs*’.

When Allah, the Blessed and Exalted, talks about Satan in the Holy Qur’an, He describes the mode in which Satan operates in the following terms: promises and wishes (as in *ya’dahum wa yamnīhim*); misguidance (as in *wa laqad aḍalla minikum jabalan kathīran*); whispering (as in *fawaswas lahum*); and embellishment of bad deeds (as in *wa idhā zayyana lahum ash-shayṭāna a’ mālahum*).

It is clear that the domain of operation here is the carnal self with its passions and whims and not reason. Allah, the Blessed and Exalted, adds that the influence of Satan will not extend to the sincere ones [*al-mukhlisīn*]. It follows then that the Greater Satan (the USA), which represents the cutting edge of Western culture will ultimately dominate all those cultures that are not possessed of pure *tawhīd*. It might even dominate Muslims who are not sincere to the faith or practice of Islam.

That is why an even avowedly atheist such as the Soviet Union, which presents itself as a system of thought and appeal to reason, was a much less dangerous adversary. And that is why we see the unique emphasis which Imām Khomeinī places on the USA and its role.

Here it becomes clear also that the ‘Japanese Model’, which many Eastern intellectuals have taken as paradigm for the successful modernization

¹ The *nafs* does not have an appropriate equivalent in English because depending on its level of debasement or development it might refer to the carnal self, the soul, or even the spirit. It is, however, to the first of these levels that I refer when I use the word *nafs*.

and at the same time preservation of cultural values may not be a viable one. In fact those who are deeply aware of Japanese culture would point to the fact although a face of traditional heritage remains, Japan is fast becoming a part of Western culture. Moreover, in some aspects, notably consumerism, sexual trends amongst the youth, and suicide, it is surpassing even the excesses of Western countries. In the long term it and other Asian cultures ultimately become Western—a distorted, controlled, misconstrued, third or fourth class West, but a West nonetheless.

It is in light of the above that the full relevance of the sacred order that Imām Khomeinī instituted becomes clear. The first real test for the role this sacred world order saw itself fulfilling and the claims it was advancing was what became as the ‘Rushdie Affair’.

Here was a book that had behind it an intellectual tradition that had developed over four centuries and has come to espouse particular views about cultural and artistic freedom: That some of the literary manifestations of this tradition were deeply offensive to the sacred symbols and beliefs of Muslims and indeed all people of religious persuasion did not matter in the least for the masters of the New World Order. If anything, they did all they could to ensure the publication and propagation of such calumnies. Here was political and economic system that had come to dominate key aspects of international affairs declaring that its own version of freedom of speech and expression was one of its articles of faith. And that it was prepared to go to extreme measures in order to protect the practitioners of such freedom in spite of the aspirations and sentiments of the Muslims worldwide. Moreover, here was a divine scholar who not only called for the banning of the book but issued a *fatwā* sentencing its author to death.

The dramatic reaction of Western powers and intellectuals toward this *fatwā* can be fully understood in the sense that it put into question and, indeed, challenged this New World Order. It had shaken to the core its philosophical and intellectual pretensions and the rights and freedoms that they advocated. One of the Western intellectuals, Anthony Burgess, who understood some of the ramifications and dimensions of this *fatwā*, declared that it “constituted a declaration of *jihād* against the Western world.”

Again, the response of the Muslims in relation to this issue was phenomenal and global. For the first time in modern history, one would get a real sense that there was a united and huge *ummah* ready to rise and defend its ideals. In the coming generations this *fatwā* will be looked at as the event that ushered in the declaration of the birth of the New Islamic World Order.

The Islamic Revolution and the sacred world order that it initiated was an event of global dimensions. In terms of the long-lasting effects it will have on the world stage, it may be considered as the most significant event of the twentieth century if not modern times. The full dimensions of this event will not be realized until sometime in the future, maybe after 50 years.

Already it had important ramifications with regard to the nation-state, international law, liberation movements and liberation theology. There were major effects also in relation to the social sciences especially political science, sociology and psychology.

For us Muslims, suffice it to say that every action that earns the pleasure of Allah contributes to the strengthening of this New Islamic World Order and brings it into final victory.