

The Integration of the Muslim World and Revival of Islamic Civilization

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Received: 2015/09/25

Accepted: 2016/02/03

Abstract

The formation of Islamic civilization based on its universal achievements is considered one of the most important turning points in the history of mankind. Throughout history, this civilization has experienced many ups and downs. The elements and factors shaping Islamic civilization have always tried to revive this civilization and universalize it throughout the time. With the collapse of the bipolar world order and the strengthening of regionalism in the international arena, Islamic countries are provided with a good opportunity to restore Islamic civilization and raising the concept of Islamic Ummah as an important pillar of power in the future world. The realization of this issue, however, requires the unification and integration of Islamic countries as main players of the revival of Islamic civilization.

Keywords

Islamic Civilization, Integration, Divergence, Muslim World

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Introduction

According to the Qur'anic verse (21:42), the desirable future of the Islamic world depends on the unity and integration of the Ummah. In addition to Islam's emphasis on the unity of Muslims, by studying recent developments in the international system, we find out that Islamic countries can only act as a powerful pole in the future, when they try to shift from divergence to integration. This goal depends on addressing the current challenges as well as thinking about the opportunities ahead.

This paper attempts to explain the necessity of integration of Islamic countries, and then, based on the recognition of historical trends and events which are shaping the integration and divergence of Islamic countries, as well as the observation of current and future developments offers the future of Islamic civilization in a range of integration and divergence. The method used in this paper is analytical-descriptive.

1. Islamic Civilization

The emergence of Islam during less than a quarter of a century caused to Arab nomads became Muslims, who had previously been the most unfortunate people in the world. Islamic civilization through this rapid progression, changed the old order and created a new world in which its political, social, economic, and ethical systems differed from the previous one. With the emergence of Islamic civilization, Muslims could achieve high positions in power, wealth and sciences. By attracting the best characteristics of other civilizations in their scientific and intellectual fields, the Muslims established a new and glorious civilization, which according

to Farhang Rajaei, “had internal solidarity, special local features and global appeal” and, as a result became global. The volume of scientific, intellectual, and technical productions of this civilization captured all fields of science and technology of that era, and its domination globalized Islamic Shari’a and culture around the World (Rajaei, 2003: 98-94).

After the Mongol invasion in seventh century, in spite of the widespread destruction of the Muslim cities and the bases of Islamic civilization, this civilization was rebuilt in the 10th century (AH) and at this time, it combined the Islamic worldview with the civilizations of Transoxania, India, Iran and Ottomans. The great empires of the Safavids in Iran, the Ottomans in Turkey and the Gurkani in India, each of them, based on their understanding of Islam, were able to regain the glory of Islamic civilization. Although, this glory declined as soon as western industrial civilization emerged and globalized (Perry, 2012: 199-204).

Because of the collapse of the bipolar system and the strengthening of regionalism in the international arena, there is great opportunity for Islamic countries to rebuild Islamic civilization and to raise Muslims as an important pole of power in the future (Iqbal, 2008, 343). But the realization of this requires the unification and integration of Islamic countries as the main contributors to the revival of Islamic civilization. In the following, the areas of integration and divergence of Islamic countries have been examined in order to identify how to achieve the Muslims desirable future within the framework of Islamic civilization.

Integration of Muslim States

Integration refers to a process in which societies ignore their independent interests and power of direction in their major policies and try to achieve common and coherent decisions (Smith & Peter, 1992: 34). In this sense, integration between countries and states does not come from necessity and compulsion, but rather it is a product of similar characteristics and a homogeneous will for continuity based on those characteristics.

Integrated and united countries have a common destiny and cannot act without consensus. In other words, these countries are locked together in an alliance, providing the structural grounds for peace. Furthermore, as they accumulate abundant power, they can pursue and fulfill important objectives (Sari al-Qalam, 2000: 54-55). This requires identification and understanding of the factors that create integration between Islamic countries.

1. Integration Factors in the Muslim World

Given the historical events and trends of the Islamic world, the factors that create integration among Islamic countries can be categorized in a spectrum of objective and subjective factors. Each of these groups of factors will be examined further.

1-1. Social Factors

The role of subnational and transnational factors should be studied as social factors. More clearly, the role of institutions, organizations and NGO networks active in each Islamic country is important as the national factors while the role of public institutions and organizations and NGOs active at the regional level is important as

transnational factors. Islamic countries have also begun efforts to form regional and international unions and organizations, realizing that effective presence in the international arena requires consensus and unity (Rahman, 1996: 749-768).

Today, unions or organizations are being established in order to promote the integration and cooperation among countries in various political, economic, cultural, scientific and technological areas, both at the regional and international levels. These unions and organizations enjoy formal structures and act transnationally according to multilateral agreements between governments. Therefore, common and informed efforts are made to facilitate interactions among countries and collective actions through regional and international organizations with more or less permanent frameworks (Evans and Nunam, 2002: 308-309).

In Islamic countries, the existence of an efficient and inclusive organization is indispensable in order to bring countries closer. The European Union is an appropriate example in this context. Although the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) could be a effective organization in terms of the integration of the Islamic world, because it includes all Islamic countries and has a valuable organizational experiences for decades, but, due to its lack of efficiency and power, it has not been able to play an significant role as Western organizations and respond to the needs of the Islamic world for its solidarity and unity. In addition, given the ongoing changes in the world of politics, it has not been able to adapt itself to the new requirements (Ye'or, 2011: 47-50).

In addition, another reason for IOC's inefficiency is the breadth of its field of action and the great differences among various ge-

ographical regions of the Islamic world. Therefore, solving this problem requires that the IOC by providing a framework for strengthening cooperation and integration among regional organizations outside of the framework of the OIC, such as the Arab League, the ECO, the Gulf Cooperation Council, ASEAN and so on, coordinates their activities and controls them. This can be effective in reducing regional competition, which weakens the OIC.

There are other factors affecting the ineffectiveness of this organization, including the dependence of some members to foreign actors, the lack of consideration of some members to their necessary cooperation with the organization, and the lack of effective mechanisms for compelling these countries to implement the resolutions of the OIC. In order to make the Organization of Islamic Conference an appropriate body for creating theoretical and practical unity in the Islamic world, this organization needs fundamental changes and deep attention to problems, such as the crisis of ideological identity, competition among members, neutralizing acts of competing organizations, strengthening the decision-making system, and so on (Choudhury , 2012: 215-217).

1-2. Value Factors

The existence of common values among countries increases the possibility of creating a general agreement, solidarity, and connection. This consensus helps national entities not to feel that they are losing their identity due to integration (Doherty and Faltzograph, 1997: 644). On this basis, Islamic values are the most important and common connecting factor among Islamic countries.

According to the teachings of Islam, all Muslims belong to a

single nation. This provides a suitable intellectual platform for the integration of Islamic countries. Although various interpretations and conceptions of Islam may act as a divergence factor, the basic teachings of Islam, which all Muslims around the world believe in, have a special emphasis on the unity of Muslims. In addition, shared values, historical civilization, historical experiences, and so on can be considered as factors that can create unity and solidarity throughout the Islamic world (Drysdale, 1997, 309-310).

1-3. Political Factors

The integration of Islamic nation-states, as the political units constituting Islamic civilization, can form an uncontested global power due to the following cases:

1. Credible power centers;

An outreaching ideology with the ability to promote itself in a global context;

2. A significant share in the global communications network due to its ability to generate spiritual material;

3. Possibility to upgrade its military organization and turning it into an effective power at the regional level;

4. A large geographic territory with a high population density;

5. A sensitive and influential geopolitical position in the global system.

It should be noted that the existence of one or more threatening powers can act as a source of solidarity and integration among threatened countries (Doherty and Faltzograph, 1997: 665). After

the collapse of the bipolar world order, the United States sought to consolidate its hegemony in a monopolistic world, as the only remaining superpower from the Cold War. Meanwhile, strengthening the integration of countries with shared interests and values can push the world towards a multipolar order. Accordingly, integration among the Islamic countries on the basis of common values can make them a pillar of power in the future.

1-4. Geographic Factors

Islamic countries are located in an area that is 11,000 kilometers long and 5,000 kilometers wide. Geopolitically, the Islamic world is consisted of three areas: the center of the Islamic world lies in the Middle East which plays a communicative role for the Muslim world; the western part of the Islamic world begins at the Suez Canal and includes the Muslim countries of Africa with its important feature being its territorial unity; and the eastern area of the Islamic world begins at the eastern border of Iran and includes the Muslims of Central Asia, India and South-East Asia (Anderson, 2013: 263-267).

In terms of geopolitical importance, the central part of the Islamic world is ranked first, the western part is ranked second, and the eastern part is third. In addition, most Islamic countries control geopolitical sensitive areas, such as communication channels, waterways, gulfs, and major seas in the world. The Dardanelles and Bosphorus Straits, the Suez Canal, Bab-el-Mandeb, the Strait of Hormuz, the Malaga Strait, the Strait of Gibraltar, the Persian Gulf, the Oman Sea, and the Red Sea play important roles in shortening the maritime and land distances between East and West

(Ehteshami, 2007: 52-53).

1-5. Economic Factors

The economic advantages of Islamic countries, if put together, can be used for bringing about integration in the flourishing of Islamic civilization. Having a large part of the world's energy reserves, being located in the important energy, goods and services distribution routes, and having a large multi-billion dollar market provide a good ground for strengthening the economic foundations in the Islamic countries in the following areas (Moqimi, 1994: 19-26):

1. Full utilization of natural and human resources;
2. Increased entry capacity in international markets and expansion of domestic markets;
3. Increased competition power for countries relying on single-product economies;
4. Decreased political pressure due to differences in economic levels;
5. Development of the monetary market by creating regional banks, common currency, and related financial institutions;
6. Expansion of statistical exchanges and economic information and development of decision-making arena.

1-6. Science and Technology

Science and technology are civilizational achievements and can only be understood in a civilizational framework. This civilization's achievement has been the most important component in

forming civilization during the history of the transformations of human societies. (Huff, 2005: 18) The study of the evolution of human societies (nomadic, rural and industrial) contains an important point in which considering it simplifies the civilization-al transformations arising from the transition from any historical stage to another. According to Toffler, if we look at all civilization-al developments, what we see is the transformation of technology.

One of the most important foundations in the formation of Islamic civilization is science and technology. In other words, the Muslims, by using the scientific and technological backgrounds of their time, strengthened the foundations of Islamic civilization, and, on the other hand, their scientific and technological potentials expanded the sphere of influence of Islamic civilization around the world. Considering this significant role, one of the most important axis of integration of Islamic countries, in order to revive Islamic civilization, is attention to science and technology as a fundamental part. Hence, providing the necessary ground for achieving a superior position in the field of science and technology is one of the strategic priorities for achieving the Islamic state's authority in international relations and the revival of Islamic civilization.

2. Divergence Factors in Islamic States

Given the historical events and trends of the Islamic world, the factors that create divergence among Islamic countries can be categorized in a spectrum of objective and subjective factors which will be examined in the following.

2-1. Land and Border Disputes

Land and border disputes are the most significant bilateral and multilateral disagreements among Islamic countries. In addition to imposing human and financial costs on the economies and societies, these disputes create grounds for more interference and abuse by the foreign powers. These differences are major obstacles to creating integration and understanding among Islamic countries and the revival of Islamic civilization. For example, in the Persian Gulf region, which is the only small part of the Islamic world, there are about 50 land and border disputes among the eight countries of the region, so far, there has been no substantial and serious desire to resolve these disputes through peaceful means. This has exacerbated the possibility of tensions between the countries of the region (Jafari Valdani, 1995: 11-12).

There are now many different territorial disputes in the Islamic world. Some of the most important of these are Morocco's claim to Western desert lands; Libya's claims to parts of the northern provinces of Chad; the differences between Saudi Arabia-Oman and Abu Dhabi over the oasis of Buraimi; the territorial disagreement between Egypt and Sudan; the claims of Iraq To the land of Kuwait; the border dispute between Iraq and Iran on the boundary line of Arvand Rood; the border disputes between Saudi Arabia and its neighbors; the disagreements between Iraq, Syria and Turkey on exploiting the Euphrates; the differences between Egypt; and Sudan and Ethiopia on the Nile. (Drysdale, *ibid*, 116-138).

2-2. Nationalism and Racism

Nationalism and Racism are two factors that can affect the inte-

gration between Islamic countries in two macro and micro levels causing divergence. Until the transmission of nationalistic ideas from Europe to the Muslim world, the idea of Islamic unity within the framework of a single power constituted the dominant ideology of the Islamic world. However, the influence of nationalism in the Muslim world, which was composed of many ethnic groups and nations, led to emergence of national governments by creating different types of Arabic, Turkish, and Iranian nationalism (Aliba-baei, 1995, 106-107).

However, the ideology of nationalism, with an emphasis on race and language in the Muslim world, which is composed of a variety of races and languages, not only cannot be a factor of integration, but also can lead to a kind of divergence. Historical experiences point to the fact that even Pan-Arabism, along with the claims of the Arab-world unification movement, could not unite Arab societies and during the Arabs' wars with Israel, which led to the defeat of the Arabs, it strongly lost their credibility and weakened. So that, during the Persian Gulf War in 1991, some Arab countries joined western forces to liberate Kuwait (Bacevich and Inbar, 2013: 95).

On the other hand, sectarianism has exacerbated ethnic and religious conflicts in the Islamic world and have prevented the formation of a unified Islamic identity by creating divergence. Historical review suggests that opposing the realization of the unity between Sunni and Shiite by extremist religious sects have been one of the serious obstacles to realizing the unity of Muslims and Islamic countries. Also, separatist demands derived from different sects not only undermined the general unity of the Islamic world,

but even affected the national and territorial unity of Islamic countries, and increased the probability of civil wars, ethnic cleansing and genocide among Islamic countries and turned into one of the major factors of divergence in the Muslim world.

2-3. Diversity of Political Systems

A variety of political systems, from absolute monarchy to republic, can be identified in Islamic countries. This diversity and difference in political systems and structures are among the factors that undermine the foundations of coalition, alliance, and unity. Similar political systems would feel more close to one another while there is a sense of rivalry among countries with different political systems. Therefore, it is very difficult to create an alliance among countries that belong to several different groups.

2-4. Political Instability and Negative Competition

Political instability in some Islamic countries, due to the weakness of political institutions and political structures in pursuit of popular legitimacy, undermines the likelihood of integration, since the greater the internal stability and the ability of foreign policy decision makers to provide domestic benefits, the higher the ability of these countries to actively participate in the process of integration.

On the other hand, political instability can lead to coup, revolution, war and armed conflicts, ongoing crises, ethnic and racial disputes, and eventually, displacement of power. The displacement of power leads to sudden transformation in that country's ruling system, and as a result, the change in priorities of its foreign policy objectives. Experts believe that this situation not only reduces the

national power of a country, but also makes it impossible for the country to pursue foreign policy, integration, and cooperation with other countries while other countries also hesitate in adopting a policy of convergence with such countries (Qavam, 1998: 82-84).

In addition, the unequal level of Islamic countries in terms of political, economic, military, etc., along with rivalries between the regional and the Islamic world, has made integration extremely problematic. Based on Historical evidences, small countries have consistently considered the efforts of powerful countries as a dominating act. In other word, when more powerful countries try to unite countries, they assume that these actors are dominating over them to influence in their authority (Safavid, 2008: 205-206).

2-5. Dependence on Foreign Powers

Islamic lands have always been points of interests for dominant powers both for strategic reasons and their natural resources. In order to maintain and enhance their interests, the great powers have always sought to establish subordinate systems and rulers in the Islamic countries, and intensify hostilities and negative rivalries among these countries with their neighbors through special plans and programs. That's why these foreign powers have started to intensify disputes and rivalries and increase divergence among Islamic countries using deterrent factors to create suspicion and division as soon as the issue of divergence has been seriously raised (Ibid: 206).

In this regard, the United States has played a special role in recent decades. Because this actor, as the only remaining Cold War superpower, is seeking to maintain its dominance over the Islamic

world, it prevents the emergence of any rival or union that limits its power. In addition, America's unconditional support of Israel has made it unacceptable that let to any collective action and political solidarity that threatens Israel's security.

In addition, lack of alignment of Islamic countries in foreign policy and the political, economic and military structural dependence of some Islamic countries to colonial powers has led these countries not only fail to carry out practical measures for realization of the unifying objectives with other Islamic countries in order to maintain their power and government, but to create barriers to the realization of these ideals in order to secure the interests of foreign powers. And last, but not the least, the unification of Islamic countries makes them a rival for western civilization. Therefore, the US, along with other Western powers, challenges any integration process among Islamic countries (Fuller & Lassar, 2005: 193-198).

The Islamic Awakening in 2011 against autocratic and dependent states, is analyzed as one of the important steps towards the liberation. Such these movements can bring about the closeness of the Islamic nations, the expansion of integration among nations and Islamic states, and, as a result, strengthen the foundations of the formation of a coherent Islamic civilization.

3. The Future of Islamic Civilization

The study of trends and events associated with the developments in Islamic civilization shows that the glorious rebirth of this civilization requires attention to the integration and divergence factors of the constituent parts of this civilization. The consolidation of

Islamic civilization as one of the pillars of power in the world depends on strengthening of integration among Islamic countries and undermining divergent factors in the interactions between these countries (Azam, 2003: 263).

The new wave of rising and reviving of Islamic civilization began through the victory of the Islamic Revolution in Iran. According to Farhang Rajaei, the occurrence of the Islamic Revolution in Iran is a reaction to modernity and self-sacrifice toward the West and is an attempt to cultivate Islam and Muslims. In addition to public uprisings in the Islamic countries, their scope is now extended to non-Muslim countries, and Muslims of such societies are among the most active and dynamic religious minorities within these countries (Rajaei Ibid: 101).

Considering the realization of revival's grounds of Islamic civilization after the victory of the Islamic Revolution of Iran, and considering the set of integrated and divergent factors, the way of realization of the desirable future of the Islamic world will be examined. This future will observe the integration of Islamic countries within the framework of the great Islamic civilization as one of the pillars of power in the future world.

In the following, we will explain the scenarios for the realization of integration of Islamic countries in terms of objective and subjective factors (Fig.1) using the Causal Layered Analysis (CLA) in the field of futures studies and in the light of historical events and trends of the unity of the Islamic world (Inayatollah, 2004: 11-15).



Figure 1: Casual Layered Analysis

1. The ***Tangible Issues*** layer focuses on the most tangible and the most obvious level forming the future of the Islamic civilization. The number of Muslims in the world, the geopolitical position of Islamic countries, the relative and competitive advantages of the Islamic countries in the field of economics, the enormous reserves of energy, and the extent of the Islamic territory, are some of the tangible factors in the revival of the Islamic civilization (Elmandjra, 1990). Therefore, the scenarios presented in this layer, such as the creation of a common market, are tangible-level scenarios.

2. The ***Social Causes*** layer refers to economic, political, and historical factors. The experience of the glorious era of Islamic civilization in the historical memory of Muslims provides a historical ground for the revival of this civilization. In addition, the advancement of integration and cooperation among Islamic countries in various political and economic spheres, both at the regional

and international levels, requires the creation of unions or organizations that, while enjoying formal structures, operates in a transnational manner on the basis of multilateral agreements between governments. In this way, common and informed efforts are made to facilitate interactions between Islamic countries and collective actions through the regional and international organizations that have permanent frameworks.

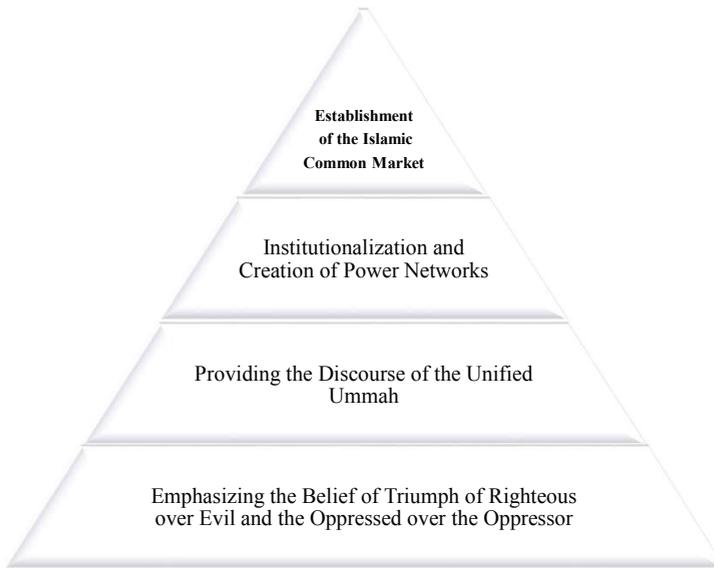


Figure 2: Scenarios of the Revival of Islamic Civilization

3. The third layer refers to the understanding of structure, ***Worldview and Discourse***, which form the social causes that have created the first two layers. The cultural, linguistic and social structures of the Islamic civilization are understood in this layer. The Islamic worldview is one of the consolidators of the Islamic civilization. The Umma is an example of this worldview. There-

fore, the underlying scenario of this layer is to emphasize the discourse of the “Unified Ummah” as what links all Muslims in the world, regardless of ethnic, religious, racial, linguistic, or cultural differences.

4. The fourth layer focuses on the understanding of signs, metaphors, and values that contribute to the formation of the dominant worldview and discourse that creates social causes and the tangible issues in a subconscious manner. In this layer, the deepest narratives, schemas and mental images shaping the future of Islamic civilization are being explored. These narratives, schemas and images are rooted not only in the thoughts but also in the feelings and beliefs of Muslims. Believing in the triumph of the righteous over evil and the oppressed over oppressor and believing in the achievement of the utopia promised in the Quran and the hadith, are all the basis of processing scenarios of realization of the ideal future for Islamic civilization in the deepest part of this conceptual model. The four scenarios selected in relation to each layer are therefore shown in Fig. 2 based on the aforementioned layers.

Conclusion

Achieving the ideal future of Islamic civilization requires employing various factors. In this article, the role of integration of Islamic countries in order to achieve the desired future of Islamic civilization was emphasized. From the perspective of futures studies, the study of the integration and divergence factors of Islamic countries shows that achieving this desirable goal will inevitably take into account the different layers shaping the future of Islamic civilization. Given the conceptual model presented, this study addresses

a spectrum of objective and mental layers forming the future of Islamic civilization. Layers that cover the most surface to deepest aspects of Islamic civilization.

Connecting the destiny of Islamic countries to each other provides relative advantages, opportunities and clear horizons for the development and strengthening of each of these countries and, as a result, the rise of the Islamic civilization. Employing Islamic beliefs and values is one of the most important factors in the formation of unity and integration among Islamic countries. Values and beliefs allows the exploitation of the existing capacities in the Muslim world to preserve and promote the interests of Islam and Muslims in the framework of the realization of the desirable future for Islamic civilization.

In this study, efforts have been made to suggest scenarios tailored to each layer in order to realize the desired future of Islamic civilization. Establishment of a common Islamic market in the tangible layer, institutionalization and creation of NGO power networks in the sphere of social factors as well as providing the discourse of unified Ummah in the third layer, and finally emphasizing on the belief in the victory of the righteous over evil and the oppressed over the oppressor in the fourth layer are possible scenarios to strengthen the integration of Islamic countries and, as a result, revive the Islamic civilization. It is worth considering that designing more accurate scenarios requires independent studies conducted on each layer in terms of studying the historical trends and events of that layer.

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