

A New Mindset to Change the Arab/Islamic-Western Relations for Peace

A Political and Socio-economic Integration Perspective

Mosad Zineldin*

Valaintisna Vasicheva**

Abstract

The root cause of the remarkable Middle East disintegration can be traced back to two main dimensions. Firstly, a regional dimension, which is related to the conflicts within the Arab/Muslim regions and secondly, an international dimension, which is related to the endemic Arab/Muslim-West conflicts. Most importantly the real problem of the Middle East is not only with the United States, Israel, or other Western countries. The political and economic suffering of the Middle East countries are related more to their own internal conflicts and policies than to their conflicts with others. The impact of the brutal inter and intra- conflicts in the Arab/Muslim region is felt not only in terms of stunted economic growth, but also through broader social, economic and political ramifications across the Middle East region and beyond. The current regional instability makes traditional models and mechanisms of integration and development difficult but not impossible to pursue. Thus, Arab/Islamic countries are in a great need to change, cooperate, regain trust between each other and build up alliances. This will help to achieve sustainable political and economic synergy and create political and economic balance of power in the global era. The aim of this paper is to outline the current Arab/Islamic-West conflict and tension as well as to define the strategies needed to achieve the Arab/Muslim shared objective of cooperation and peaceful coexistence.

Key words: MENA, Terrorists, , Peace, Media, War, Muslims, West, Power

* Professor in Strategic Relationship Management, School of Business and Economics, Masters in Peace and Development , Masters in Psychology, School of Social Sciences, Linnaeus University, Sweden.

** School of Social Sciences, Peace and Development, Linnaeus University, Sweden.

Clash of Civilisations, or Cooperation between Civilisations? That is the Question!

Civilized nations are those who respect the rule of law, solve economic clashes with dialogue, not war.

I've come here to Cairo to seek a new beginning between the United States and Muslims around the world, one based on mutual interest and mutual respect, and one based upon the truth that America and Islam are not exclusive and need not be in competition. Instead, they overlap and share common principles, principles of justice and progress, tolerance and the dignity of all human beings.ⁱ

President Barak Obama

Introduction

Colonial history, unbalanced political and military powers between the West and Arab/Muslim countries are some of the sources of tension and conflict. The Arab-Israeli dispute is one of the modern world's longest running conflicts and has proven practically impossible to resolve to date. This unresolved Arab-Israeli conflict is often cited as the root of all the Arab/Muslim-West conflicts and problems.

More recently, tension has been fuelled by colonialism that denied rights and opportunities to many Muslims and a Cold War in which Muslim majority countries were too often treated as proxies without regard for their own aspirations. Moreover, the sweeping change brought by modernity and globalization led many Muslims to view the West as hostile to the traditions of Islam.ⁱⁱ

Bernard Lewis argues that cultural and historical resentments of colonialism and religious grievances are the root causes of the Middle East conflict.ⁱⁱⁱ The September 11, 2001 events exacerbated this tension and the suspicion toward the Muslim world.

However, there is little evidence that Arabs perceive the West as a Crusader force, intending to destroy the Islamic world in a battle over religious beliefs. Most Muslims/Arabs consider religious fanaticism to be a problem in their societies.^{iv} They believe that the vast majority of Westerners and those in the US in particular, are not as strongly influenced by religious motives, as by economic and political ones.

Jackson, on the other hand, argues that Western involvement in terrorism has a long but generally ignored history, which includes the extensive use of official terror by Britain, France, Germany, Portugal, the US and other colonial powers as a form of governance and social control in numerous countries throughout the colonial period. The author concludes that states are involved in a tremendous amount of terrorism, most of which is never subject to systematic evaluation in the literature.^v

Today, groups are coming together all over the world with the idea of defending themselves economically and politically against other blocs. These groups also want to increase their influence both in their own areas and outside. For example, Europe has

adopted a single currency as a base for a single economy. The Far East has already made its own regional trade agreements and free trade zones.

A single country, standing alone, could never hope to achieve anything against large economic, military and/or political blocs. The bigger the bloc is, the greater the clout and its influence^{vi}. What then will be the fate of a small country – such as Lebanon, Libya, Bahrain, Qatar, or any other Arab/Muslim country that is outside a bloc – when it is pitted against one of these large economic groupings? It is abundantly clear that countries that stand alone will have to follow the dictates of large blocs.

Against these trends and in order to provide an effective counter to European, Asian, or American economic and political powers and designs, the immediate formation of an Arab/Muslim Common Market and political alliance must become the most pressing imperative.

The main dilemma is that the MENA countries often compete rather than cooperate with each other. Thus, one could not assume that the current circumstances of Arab/Islamic countries are favourable for economic integration. Arab countries must find ways to cooperate, build *trust* and alliances with each other to achieve some synergy and create an economic balance. They need to build up a sound and effective communication and mutually beneficial relationship^{vii}.

One important issue is that the MENA states' real problem is not only with the United States, Israel, or other Western countries. We have to admit that the political and economic sufferings of the MENA countries are related more to their own internal policies than to the conflict with others.^{viii}

In his speech to the Muslim World from Cairo in June 2009, US President Barak Obama stated that:

It's easier to start wars than to end them. It's easier to blame others than to look inward. It's easier to see what is different about someone than to find the things we share. ^x

If the Arabs stopped blaming others for all their troubles and worried more about their own identity, values, religion, education, democracy, science and technology, economic liberalization and economic integration among themselves, their economies would quickly become competitive. If Muslim/Arab countries do not get their act together, they will always stay far behind. They will remain bystanders while other world political and military alliances, international trading system (e.g. World Trade Organization, WTO and General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, GATT) and globalization movements move forward in leaps and bounds.^{xi}

Objective of the study

The aim of the paper is to outline the current Arab/Muslim-West conflict and tension as well as the strategies needed to achieve the Arab/Muslim shared objective of cooperation

and peaceful coexistence. Such cooperation and integration can be a sound base for fair and just re-distribution of the economic and political powers.

This study is a continuation of previous research efforts to develop a new approach to strategic relationships.^{xixixixiv} It presents a theoretical, conceptual and empirical discourse based on recent developments in political sciences, economics and international communication, negotiation and relation theories as well as semi-structured personal interviews. It provides a different perspective. It integrates the micro and macro socio-economic factors and political forces and analyses the process of establishment and development of a strategic sustainable political and economic integration and development.

Methodology

Muslims comprise around one and a third billion people. The Arab world comprises around 300 million Arabic-speaking people across 20 countries. It is linked by a common heritage, culture and language but with extreme differences in political orientation. Living standards vary from oil-rich Gulf States to extreme poverty elsewhere. Although not all Arabs are Muslims nor are all Muslims, Arab, most Arabs are Muslims. For the purpose of this paper Arabs and Arab countries will be referred to as Muslims or Islamic countries.

The paper is based on an abductive qualitative research method with a holistic approach which includes economic, political and social factors. The choice was based on the strengths of the holistic approach for understanding the socio-economic and political context and processes and for interpreting and analysing the collected material.^{xv}

A snowball sampling method and personal contacts to find individuals and organisations relevant for this study was used.^{xvi} Semi-structured personal interviews were taken with ten experts with different backgrounds, i.e. politicians, economists, professors, diplomatic officials, ambassadors and journalists from Egypt, Morocco, Jordan and Saudi Arabia. The respondents are professionals in the area of political sciences, economics and international law. Personal interviews were carried out to gain more insight into the problem area. The main advantages of personal interviews, i.e. face to face are: one can secure the greatest value which lies in the depth and detail of the information.

The Islam: there is nothing wrong with the Islamic identity

While the antagonism between the Muslim world and Christian Europe is decades and centuries old, it is after the September 2001 events that the link between Islam and terrorism emerged as the central concern of the US administration and more generally of the 'West'. Although the Bush Administration, on several occasions, distanced itself from anti-Islamist statements, reiterating that Islam is a religion of peace, public statements reveal a pattern of anti-Islamist polemics.

Lewis Bernard, Professor of Near Eastern Studies and the author of a considerable number of books on the Arab, Middle East and Muslim countries, reiterated the fact that:

The period which European historians see as a dark interlude between the decline of ancient civilization-Greece and Rome- and the rise of modern civilization-Europe, Islam was the leading civilization in the world, marked as such by its great and powerful kingdoms, its rich and varied industry and commerce, its original and creative sciences and letters. Islam, far more than Christendom, was the intermediate stage between the ancient East and the modern West, to which it contributed significantly.^{xvii}

Islam orders its people via the Quran to cooperate, to be helpful to goodness and piety but not to evil and malice (Verse 2 in sura 5). Prophet Mohammed applied this principle of co-operation no matter who your neighbour is: Muslim or non-Muslim.

In fact Islamic countries are almost indifferent as regards their true identity. This is the real problem. Many leaders and nationals of Islamic countries identify themselves as Muslims but they do behave in non-Islamic manner. When the governments of Islamic countries run their policies on non-Islamic bases one can not talk about a possible or successful achievement of any integration among Islamic countries... At present some people would therefore dare to say that Islamic countries are incapable of bearing the responsibilities of Islam and that it is better for them to behave in the modern secular pattern. Others refuse these opinions. They are still full of hopes that they would be able to bring about favorable changes to their countries, so that Islamic ideology would regain its proper place and thus affects the course of political, economic and social life.^{xviii}

Arab and Muslim leaders have to work on changing or correcting the image of Islam in the Western world. At the same time Western countries must also be able to accept the real image of Islam and prove that they can peacefully live and deal with people and nations of different identities, cultures and religions. They do not need to feel that their own society is superior and any society that does not try to emulate their own is substandard or inferior.

It was innovation in Muslim communities that developed the order of algebra, the magnetic compass and tools of navigation, the mastery of pens and printing, an understanding of how diseases spread and how it can be healed. Majestic arches and soaring spires, timeless poetry and cherished music, elegant calligraphy and places of peaceful contemplation are all the priceless contribution of Islamic culture. And throughout history, Islam has demonstrated through words and deeds the possibilities of religious tolerance and racial equality.^{xix}

Islam is not a threat for anybody or any nation. Islam is the religion of mercy, justice, tolerance and honour for promises and pledges. It encourages people to become acquainted with one another, promotes dialogue, and directs people to be gentle and polite when engaged in an argument. Islam does not view itself as a new religion, only as the culmination of many earlier prophetic missions, including of course those given to Jews and Christians.

The West and the war against terror

In his speech at Cairo University, June 4, 2009, to the Muslim World Barak Obama stated the following:

We meet at a time of great tension between the United States and Muslims around the world, tension rooted in historical forces that go beyond any current policy debate. The relationship between Islam and the West includes centuries of coexistence and cooperation but also conflict and religious wars. More recently, tension has been fed by colonialism that denied rights and opportunities to many Muslims and a Cold War in which Muslim majority countries were too often treated as proxies without regard to their own aspirations. Moreover, the sweeping change brought by modernity and globalization led many Muslims to view the West as hostile to the traditions of Islam.^{xx}

European political and economic colonization of the Arab region began in the early 1800s. Britain and France effectively controlled most of the Arab world until the mid 1900s – with political repercussions extending to the present day.

The Third World, including Arab countries, only exists because it has been created. The creative force was not history or geography, or economics. It was psychology and politics, namely 'Western guilt' and the politics of foreign aid, which between them conjured up 'the Third World'. Without foreign aid there is no Third World. West is responsible for the poverty of most of developing world. Once the psychological and political influences on the identity of the Arab world have been clarified, the further question of whether they share a common type of economy will be addressed.^{xxi}

According to Storm, for decades there has been a tendency in the West — particularly in the United States — to classify different regimes across the globe as either "good" or "bad". Recently, since the beginning of 1990s, this policy has been extended to classify Islamists as either "good" or "bad".^{xxii} This modern tendency was further strengthened following the 9/11 attacks in the US. For example, in analyzing recent published material on terrorism some researchers found that the majority of articles published under the rubric of terrorism is based on the polarization between US (Americans, westerners), and THEM (terrorists, Arabs, Muslim fundamentalists, etc.).^{xxiii}^{xxiv}

On the other hand, some researchers argue that the US depends on the Middle East for nearly half of its oil imports, giving the US a big incentive to intervene to promote allies' political stability and hence economic dominance. Many studies consistently argue that US foreign policy toward the Arab-Israeli conflict and the Iraqi war is the most fundamental reason for problems between the US-West and the Middle East region and Muslim World as a whole. The majority of Arabs also question the justifications for the US-led war in Iraq and Afghanistan and do not expect the war to lead either to the establishment of democracy in these countries or to a better standard of living for their people.^{xxv}

This misconceived, and according to many, unjust war in Iraq has a considerable long term negative impact, not only on the Arab/Muslim countries, but also on the United States of America and the American people. Sir Lawrence Freedman hinted at this:

History cannot be rewound. The cumulative misjudgments of the past have left the Americans stranded in a desperate country in a region in which their stock has never been lower. There are no quick fixes. It will take time for them to repair their regional connections and regain their international standing. It will take time for the violence in Iraq to consume itself and for new political configurations and leaders to develop.^{xxvi}

Zineldin in interview with Al-Jazeera TV – Inside Story –regarding the relationship between Iran and the West argues that the real conflict has nothing to do with the nuclear issue. Iran does not threaten the region or any other country. If the West finds any economic benefit or interest to cooperate with Iran, the West will start the cooperation. The US and West use the nuclear issue to oppose Iran and its Islamic regime. The main goal is to protect Israel's interest.^{xxvii}

US President Barak Obama and other former US presidents and politicians have stated that these wars are wars against terrorism – not a war against Arabs or Islam.^{xxviii} Nevertheless, many still consider these wars in Iraq and Afghanistan as crusaders invasion which create political and economic instability, destruction, internal conflicts between Arab/Muslim countries and even between different ideologies inside some of Arab/Muslim countries (e.g. Palestine, Lebanon, Syria, Egypt, Sudan, Somalia, etc). Another factor encouraging political and economical uncertainty and instability is perhaps the absence of democratic governments in most of the Arab/Muslim countries.

A new mindset for the change

The overall cost of the above mentioned conflicts is very high, since it causes political, social and economic instability, generating delays in Arab-Muslim economic and political integration, and lowers foreign investment and slower rates of growth.

It is a mistake to consider that Islamic and Western countries are incapable of bearing the responsibilities of proper change to a positive course of political, economic and social life. The West is not hostile to the traditions of Islam and Islam is not the enemy of the West because the West and the Islam are not and will not be exclusive.^{xxix} They do not need to compete but on the other hand enter a win-win cooperative relationship. Such a relationship requires a new beginning, a change and a new mindset of both Arabs/Muslims and the West. The new beginning should be based on mutuality: mutual interdependence, mutual respect, mutual trust and mutual commitment.

Zineldin developed and established a new approach called Total Relationship Management (TRM). He argues that TRM highlights the essential role and impact of mutuality of interdependence, respect, trust and commitment. He considers the role of communication and interaction as moderators between structure/behavioural conditions and outcomes such as mutual satisfaction, mutual trust and mutual commitment levels between partners.^{xxxi xxxii} TRM can be a tool for change and a new mindset to improve Arab/Muslim vs. West relationship and interactions. TRM highlights the development of collaboration, partnership and building trust and commitment for the implementation, problem-solving and success of

the participatory communication activities among and between Arabs/Muslims and the West. Close cooperation and good communication processes are essential to build trust and commitment in any relationship. Such a mindset can be inspired and encouraged by the following statement of President Obama:

Given our interdependence, any world order that elevates one nation or group of people over another will inevitably fail. So whatever we think of the past, we must not be prisoners to it. Our problems must be dealt with through partnership, our progress must be shared. ...Now, that does not mean we should ignore sources of tension. Indeed, it suggests the opposite. We must face these tensions squarely. And so, in that spirit, let me speak as clearly and as plainly as I can about some specific issues that I believe we must finally confront together.^{xxxiii}

The power of cooperation and economic integration

As mentioned in the previous sections, the root cause of the remarkable Middle East disintegration can be traced back to two main dimensions. A regional dimension is related to the conflicts within the Arab/Muslim regions and an international dimension is related to the endemic Arab/Muslim-West conflicts. The global economy now sets the rules for the economic policies which may also have to be adopted at the regional level. An economic integration is a prerequisite for facing or achieving some levels of globalization^{xxxiv}.

Cooperation is seen as the basic value in Islam's economic philosophy. Besides being required by human brotherhood and equality, unity of purpose and common ultimate interests, and also besides being explicitly enjoined by Quran and Sunnah it is the attitude that suits the practical interests of mankind today. The Islamic view of cooperation does not rule out free and fair competition in the market (local, regional or global), provided all economic agents adhere to Islamic morality. This makes it even more necessary to visualize how the cooperative spirit can translate itself into action where many different countries and millions of individual units are involved, knowledge is imperfect and communications involve costs.

Globalization of Western countries can cause more problem and crisis for the developing countries, if these countries are not able to compete or cooperate with developed countries. The existing economic blocs in Europe and USA, Asia etc. create more a unbalanced economic situation which may increase the *tension* between the south and the north. These blocs would have an extremely prominent and powerful position as guides and advisers in Middle East countries. Without such power sharing and without socio-economic integration between Middle Eastern countries there is no interdependence relationship between Western and Arabs/Muslims and hence there is probably no peace. Strong dependency on the US or Western nations or blocs is not beneficial for the Arab countries or the West^{xxxv}.

Meanwhile, there have been several attempts for economic integration in the Islamic world. However, these attempts have not been positive. A major advantage in the effort to integrate Arab/Muslim countries is the region's stable and homogeneous culture compared

to many other areas of the world. Coca-Cola's Senior Vice- President Sam Ayoub noted that 'Arabs are much more capable of making distinctions between cultural and religious purposes on the one hand and economic realities on the other than is generally assumed. Islam is compatible with science and modern times'.^{xxxvi}

Arab and Muslim societies can fruitfully link itself with the global economy so as to satisfy its basic needs while maintaining its moral purpose by following the principles of the 'Shariaa'. Egypt is an example of such a society where the two coexist. Islam is not against modernization. The problem is not modernization; the problem is certain aspects of modernization. For example, Muslims need hotels, but do they need casinos? Muslim conservatives do not object foreign investment; however investments should not promote pornography, extramarital sex, alcoholism, drug addiction, gambling, juvenile delinquency and crimes. Muslim conservatives reject these evils in any society as they are totally unrelated to progress and modernization^{xxxvii}.

Governments throughout the world are revitalizing their economies – some by drastic reforms and others by enacting laws that streamline existing systems. However, most Arab/Islamic economies, on the other hand, are not being changed quickly enough. They have not participated fully in the drive to liberalize trade and so have not derived the benefit they might have by doing so.

Maeena states that:

We in Arab world always express satisfaction at the state of Arab industrial output. But while advances have certainly been made in some sectors, many others within the Arab world lag far behind those of other Asian countries, let alone Europe or the Americas... What is required is a sincere and honest critique of our present position, and also the creation of research centers. We have had enough of gigantic airports and monstrous shopping malls filled with imported goods. We must focus on the much-needed and highly relevant technology industries that will ply such vital roles in the next century. We cannot afford to be lax any longer.^{xxxviii}

The recent report of the World Bank "Doing Business 2008" points out that most Arab countries lag behind many other regions of the developing and developed world in creating a competitive environment for business and investment. Despite awarding Egypt the title of top reformer of the year, it still ranks very low (127th out of 178). While Saudi Arabia made significant progress (ranks 23rd), the position of other countries in the region has significantly worsened in recent years. Jordan, ranks 80th, compared with 73rd in 2006, Sudan ranks 143rd and Syria – 137th.^{xxxix}

Arabs do not use their vast resources to, at least, acquire some of the basic knowledge to be players in the international explosion of technology and commerce. It is a fact that billions of US Dollars are invested by wealthy Arabs all over the world in foreign stock markets. Creating an Arab Common market and healthy investment environment would attract some of these billions into the Arab markets.

The goal of economic liberalisation and integration cannot be achieved while Arab/Muslim countries continue to have conflicts with each other and to be politically and

economically subservient to the world super powers. Before economic liberalisation they have to achieve political and economic independence.

A regional collaborative relationship (RCR) for global competitiveness

It is time for Arab/Muslim countries to ignore the talk about the political and economical domination of Western countries. Creating a regional collaborative economic and political relationship is an efficient way to cooperate through strategic networks. For the purpose of this research, a regional collaborative relationship (RCR) is defined as:

An ongoing relationship between different independent countries and their economic organizations (collaborators) from different ends of the region that involves a mutual goal and commitment, mutual trust, a mutual sharing of information, risks, and rewards of the relationship. The committed collaborators cooperate, coordinate activities, and collaborate to create new value and to be more effective in the global world. RCR emphasizes a win-win situation where all the collaborators get value from others who do not lose it.^{xi}

The essence of the RCR system is collaboration and regional integration through networks and alliances. This collaborative system is viewed as an arrangement by which countries set up a web of close economic collaborator relationships in an efficient coordinated manner. Such integration and relationships offer countries opportunities to globally compete and cooperate (*co-opetition*) with other countries and organizations^{xii} outside the region.

Of course, there is a possibility of achieving some success on schemes of partial economic integration on a limited scale, say between some regional countries such as GCC.^{xiii} Fortunately, the Gulf countries, led by Saudi Arabia, have realized the importance of creating a free trade bloc. Even more importance comes from the reforms undertaken by the Gulf countries to strengthen their financial systems. In 2009, an attempt was made to create a single Gulf currency and diversify investments in to other resources besides oil production. In comparison, these steps may be small, but they are the right steps forward. The next important move is to focus on creating the regional trade zone. It might be hard, but evidence is ample that free trade zones are growing even among the world's poorest countries, as in South America and Africa, despite their existing political problems.

The economic independence or interdependence in the form of cooperation and integration instead of merely competition would be the key to Arab prosperity and development^{xiii}. There could also be products manufactured in different parts of the region and marketed for the whole region. For example, a car assembled in Syria, with the engine manufactured in Egypt, plastic parts manufactured in Saudi Arabia, furniture in Morocco, etc. This is a simple dream that seems very difficult to be realized. Why is such a simple dream difficult to be realized by the Arabs? The answer is simple: it is not only because of economic or political reasons, but also because of sociological reasons, e.g. trust and commitment^{xiv}.

Thus, the future awaits the Arabs. Whether it is good or bad depends on how shrewdly and how effectively political and economic strategies are formed. Such strategies are essential in order to counter the policies of other already-formed economic and political blocs.

SWOT analysis of the Arab region

Without cooperation and integration between Arab countries, it is difficult to face the new global economic order. If such cooperation is to survive, a regional SWOT (Strengths, Weakness, Threats and Opportunities) analysis, and a regional development plan should be prepared, taking into account each country's comparative advantage and preventing lateral competition between Arab countries. Table 1 presents a SWOT table to be considered by Arab countries. The SWOT is based on theoretical reviews and personal interviews.

Table 1: Some SWOT Among Arab/Muslim countries

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ~ Strong historical, religious, cultural, and language affinities ~ Common and unique values and moral standards ~ Capital, intellect, labor and skills ~ Natural resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ~ Lack of trust and commitment ~ Lack of technology and technological infrastructure ~ Lack of a healthy investment environment and capital market ~ Economic/political dependence on Western Countries, e.g. USA ~ Identity problem and crisis ~ Conflicts between Arabs ~ Tussle between 'the B's' - business and bureaucracy ~ Lack of statistics and dependable demographic studies ~ Lack of experimental science and technology ~ Existing trade barriers ~ Restrictive ownership rules ~ Closed financial markets
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ~ Effective use of resources by improving the quality of their human capital resources ~ Be strong enough to be a global competitive union ~ Economic Integration and Arab Common Market ~ Creating incentives for Arabs abroad to return to their lands and help their countries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ~ The existing economic and political blocs and globalization ~ Lack of vision ~ Lack of clear and well-defined banking and monetary systems and procedures ~ Foreign economic blocs ~ Heavy foreign debt ~ The current tension situation between Arabs and Israel ~ Internal competition among Arab countries ~ Fundamentalist and radical movements ~ Heavy intervention of foreign sources to evaluate the region's countries economic significance

These weaknesses create obstacles to free trade among the Arabs. Arabs cannot expect the distinctions of politics, geography and history to vanish overnight. Therefore, what they ought to do is to start acting conscientiously to cut distinctions to size, and consequently to get them marginalized so that they may be able to eliminate them altogether. To protect the Arabic and Islamic values which are at present subject to cultural, intellectual and social onslaughts, the greatest responsibility of the leadership of the Arab world is to bring together the disfranchised, the un-integrated, and at times, antagonistic elements of Arab society into a harmonious whole.

In order to achieve the set objectives Arabs/Muslims have to bridge the gap between what they preach and what they practice and they must fill a great gap of disagreement and trouble between the masses and their leaders. If they long to achieve such goal, regardless of ideological beliefs or philosophy, it is their duty to build a bridge between the leaders and their people, a bridge across which both the leaders and followers can interact.

Unless Arab/Muslim countries create mutual trust and commitment between the different countries in the region including even Israel, Iran and Syria and learn from other nation's integration experiences, they will always remain the last in everything and ultimately the biggest losers. The real issue is the effective diplomatic negotiation and communication based on trust and commitment among Arab governments and between them and the West. The most problematic for Arab/Islamic countries is the question whether they are flexible enough to adopt the idea and treat it as a matter of strategic importance to be implemented in the shortest time. They should ignore the talk about domination of other countries. It will be soon realized that whatever domination there is, it will be a win-win relationship and as a result - mutual interdependence, and mutual interest. Effective communication and diplomatic negotiation will enable the representatives of Arab/Islamic countries to set up integration road map and to have a chance to achieve their aim.

Discussion and Conclusions

The Islam

In the past, the Muslim community mingled with other civilizations, absorbing what was seen as useful and rejecting what was seen as not. In such a manner the community progressed in many different ways – culturally, politically, sociall, and economically. If that was possible in the past, it is also possible today. Keeping its identity, the Muslim community is not incapable of dealing with the modern and global era. There is nothing wrong if a Muslim makes use of anything that can strengthen his/her Islamic and intellectual identity and protect his/her society.

Many studies consistently argue that the US foreign policy toward the Arab-Israeli conflict and the Iraqi war is the most fundamental reason for problems between the US/West

and the Arab/Muslim world. Policymakers in the United States and the United Kingdom have reasons to be concerned about the demographic and political trends in the region. Arab/Muslims economic cooperation, integration and improving cross-cultural dialogues, negotiations and undertaking societal and cultural exchanges can diminish the political tensions.

Unless Arab countries, which are dominated by Muslims, create mutual trust and commitment between the different countries in the region including even Israel, Iran and Syria and learn from other nation's integration experiences, it will always remain the last in everything and ultimately the biggest loser.

The West and the war on terror

Today, there is a considerable disapproval by most Arabs/Muslims of Western foreign policy. The US policies in the Middle East, is at the heart of the fundamental disagreement between the West and the Arab/Islamic World. The personal interviews as well as the theoretical review show that dissatisfaction with US foreign policy is widespread across Arabs/Muslims. There is little evidence that the tensions between the Arab world and the West, and specifically the US will diminish unless the US and the West reform their foreign policies and strategies to deal with all countries in the region as equal partners. The empirical data confirms the conventional wisdom that Arabs are largely disenchanted with the West, but it also suggests a number of important refinements. First, Arabs/Muslims do not feel equally negatively toward all Western countries and media have some responsibility for the bad image of them^{xiv}. Effective communication and fair media should work on changing or correcting such image in the Western world.

This finding is consistent across the interviewed experts. They do not see Islam, or religious differences with the West in general, as a significant reason for hostility between the East and West. Cultural differences are not found at the heart of current Arab-West tensions. Rather, the conflict is rooted in deep-seated frustration with Western, and particularly American, foreign policies. The major reason is economic and the unjust use of political, military and economic powers. Additionally, lack of democracy in most of Arab/Muslim countries creates domestic and regional tensions as well.

Cooperation, Integration and Communication

The impact of the brutal inter and intra-conflicts in the Arab/Muslim region is felt in relation to stunted economic development, and in social, economic and political spheres inside and outside the Arab/Islamic region. The current regional instability makes traditional models and mechanisms of development difficult but not impossible to pursue.

For the Arab/Muslim countries, it has become a matter of some urgency to develop such an economic integration, packed with common political strategy, in order to allow the region to move beyond the current weak position where, for example, inter-Arab trade

presents only eight per cent of the Arab world's total trade as well as the dangerous political fragmentation.

Most of the conflicts and wars emerge because of the competition for resources. It has been observed that the competitive psychology represents oneself as being better than others, and stresses the accumulation of resources at their expense. The antithesis is active co-operation, wherein one embraces competitors in partnership to the benefit of all. It is argued that the new global environment demands new kinds of relationships – “co-opetitive” partnerships, coined by Zineldin as a more effective response to changed environmental threats and opportunities. Co-opetition can deliver synergy if carefully planned, managed and controlled^{xlvixlvii}.

Most Arab/Muslim countries do not change quickly enough to cope with the challenges of the globalization and political and military alliances and integration which have emerged in the West. The region is still suffering from a state of fragmentation and disruption. One of the most important issues for Arab countries is to review their own internal present conditions and problems with honesty and candour, as they proceed from their faltering present to a future fraught with challenges and opportunities. They have to realize that the way they deal with these challenges and opportunities is bound to have a direct impact on their nation's destiny and the kind of future that awaits them.

A regional economical and political development cooperation and integration plan should be prepared by Arab countries. If such cooperation is to survive, a regional SWOT (Strengths, Weakness, Threats and Opportunities) must be conducted, taking into account each country's comparative advantages and preventing lateral competition between Arab countries. The success or failure of such a relationship among themselves lies directly with the socio-economical and political leadership and management competence in the strategic partners. In essence, a regional economic relationship requires a radical change and redefinition of each country and its culture. Confidence, trust, commitment, ethics, and the way in which crises and difficulties should be treated and solved among the region's countries are central factors of this relationship.

Co-opetition thus implies that countries or any conflicting partners can negotiate and interact in rivalry due to conflicting interests, and at the same time co-operate due to common interests. The communication, negotiation and the interaction process between the negotiators are influenced by the atmosphere and culture in the specific international environment. In turn, the communication and atmosphere are influenced by the characteristics of the parties involved and the nature of the interaction itself, and can affect the negotiation result in a positive or negative way.

However, it will be naive to postulate that the Arab/Muslims' real problem is related only to United States, Israel, or other Western countries. It is clear that the economic sufferings and torture of the Arab countries stem more from their own internal policies than from the conflicts with others. Without political, socio-economic change for integration between Arab

countries, there is no interdependence relationship between Westerners and Arabs. A strong dependency on Western nations or blocs is not beneficial to either the Middle Eastern or Western countries. It creates tension and a basis for conflicts.

If the Arab/Muslim and Western countries stopped blaming each other for all troubles and worried more about how to move forward towards a common ground for fair and mutual beneficiary economical and political cooperation, the economies of both sides would quickly become more competitive. It is time that Middle East region and other Arab/Muslim countries work together with the US and Western countries to reform the new era of peace and cooperation. Achieving such goal is not as simple as it sounds. President Barak Obama, (2009) hinted at this, saying:

I know there are many, Muslim and non-Muslim, who question whether we can forge this new beginning. Some are eager to stoke the flames of division and to stand in the way of progress. Some suggest that it isn't worth the effort, that we are fated to disagree and civilizations are doomed to clash. ...Many more are simply skeptical that real change can occur. There is so much fear, so much mistrust that has built up over the years. But if we choose to be bound by the past, we will never move forward. ...The question is whether we spend that time focused on what pushes us apart or whether we commit ourselves to an effort, a sustained effort to find common ground, to focus on the future we seek for our children and to respect the dignity of all human beings. ^{xlviii}

Finally, Arab/Muslim countries as well as Western countries would benefit from the economic integration. Such integration is expected to improve the terms of trade with the rest of the world and create a better global economic, military and political balance. As a result, Arab/Muslim countries could be treated as an equal partner in today's global world. They will not feel that they are merely weak partners who are subject to exploitation by other economic and political blocs.

There is an urgent need for a new beginning, and the time is right here. We have the power to make the world we seek, but only if we have the courage to make a new beginning.

Barak Obama

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