UMMATIC SECURITY: CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES AND THEIR CONCEPTUAL AND EMPIRICAL DIMENSIONS

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ABSTRACT

In the contemporary world, like any other nation, the Muslim Ummah as a whole is governed by international relations (IR) theory or theories, which define the relations between states, communities, people, cultures, and institutions. Despite being free from the reign of colonial powers, the Muslim Ummah still lags behind the rest of the developed world in political and socioeconomic stability and prosperity. The present paper analyzes various IR theories to determine whether the lack of progress of the Muslim Ummah is due to the application of these theories or if it is the irrelevance of these theories which hinder the process. Furthermore, it addresses the key challenges that the Muslim Ummah faces and introduces Islām as an IR theory.

KEYWORDS: Muslim world, International Relations, IR theories, Realism, Muslim identity, Islāmic IR.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Muslim Ummah used to be a world superpower. It used to be a modern and innovative nation. Today, the Muslim world in general is comprised of states that can be identified as the less or least developed in the world with no real contribution to global development (Matthews, 2016). While history remembers the past glory of the Ummah and its' desire to return to those golden times, we see no progress. The Muslim world still lags behind the rest of world in almost everything, from security to stability. Muslim leaders have a responsibility to explore the major shortcomings of the Ummah in order to find solutions to the current crisis and bring about significant progress.

International Relations (IR) is the study of relations between states, communities, people, cultures, and institutions. There is a high probability that Muslims of today apply the wrong IR theory or theories, which consequently has influenced the Ummah's economic prosperity and sociopolitical stability. Furthermore, instead of concentrating on specific issues country-by-country, the paper focuses on the global issues shared by the Muslim world, which often go against Islāmic principles and greatly contribute to the current crisis.

This research attempts to answer some important questions, e.g., what systems of international relations are present in various Muslim countries and are they effective? Is there an IR theory (or theories) which is most suitable for the Muslim counties or an Ummah as a whole? What are the factors that have placed the Muslim countries to its current state? Are the Muslims to blame for their current state, or is it an outcome of some bigger scheme which is out of their control? In this perspective, the paper aims to summarize the observable major challenges faced by the Muslim Ummah, which need to be addressed in order to resolve some of their current issues. It also attempts to differentiate between the challenges which are the result of the colonial era and those that Muslims have created with their own hands. Furthermore, it discusses some of the contemporary international theories applied in the Muslim World in order to address their effectiveness.

In spite of aspirations to promote Islāmic law as the state law expressed by some leading figures such as Maududi, Khomeini, Sayyid Qutb, and several other intellectuals (Lipka, 2017), the Muslim World still does not have any contemporary real-life example of the application of the Islāmic law in its pristine entirety to follow or critically examine and compare. Thus, they are deprived of the possibility of a review of a case study of Islāmic paradigm of international relations. Hence, the majority of the research and debate is confined to either distorted or manipulated versions of the application of Islāmic law or its theoretical interpretation.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The literature review presents three major opinions on Islām as IR and the political scene in the Muslim world. According to the opinion of J. Harris Proctor, expressed in *Islām and International Relations*, the idea of Islām being the conduct of international relations and the formulation of foreign policies by states is attractive yet rests upon a weak basis (Proctor, 1965). His approach presents the traditional Western point of view, which views Islām as a mere religion. John Turner in *Islām as a Theory of International Relations?* correctly points out that Islām must be regarded not just as a subject to be studied within existing IR theory, but also as a paradigm of the IR on its own (Turner, 2009). Thus, Islāmic IR cannot be understood through existing IR lenses because Islām has a valid and strong political concept.

During a Panel Discussion on *Arab Liberalism and Democracy in the Middle East*, Tamara Cofman Wittes analyzed the weak position of liberals in the Arab world. She proposes various means of US support for these individuals and how to bring about change in the Middle-Easter region (Democracy, 2004). It reflects that this type of thinking can be considered as an extension of colonization, where one nation believes that their own worldview should be implemented in another nation regardless of their compatibility with it.

International Theories

Many different IR theories, to some extent, are present throughout the Muslim world today. It is important to determine, what kind of impact these theories have and how compatible they are with Islāmic teachings. It is noteworthy that realism is the main theory of IR. It is defined as a set of inter-related sub-theories which emphasize the role of the state, national interest and military power in world politics (Bell, 2017). It focuses on human selfishness, which goes against the principles of the Islāmic faith. Realism in the Muslim world is further demonstrated, for example, by Iran and Saudi Arabia's efforts to establish and maintain security and political stability through a military alliance with great superpowers such as the United States (Alzamalkani, 2015) (Etudier, 2010). Hence, instead of seeking ties with its Muslim neighbors, it is seeking protection from others. Regardless, it is noteworthy that some aspects of realism are included in the Islāmic IR such as its stance on defensive and offensive war (Michael Freeden, 2013, p. 639).

Liberalism is based on the assumption that the actors of international systems can reach peaceful cooperation regardless of their ideological world (Internationalrelations.org, n.d.). This belief in and of itself is in harmony with the Islāmic IR. However, they also believe that freedom of the individual is the central problem of politics (Kenneth Minogue, Harry K. Girvetz, Terence Ball, Richard Dagger, 2018). Meaning, individual liberty is of prime importance regardless of the general community or its state of well-being. The Arab liberal thought is not very strong in the Muslim world because it addresses Islām as a private affair and those in favor are considered traitors who are trying to sabotage the Arab society and its regimes (Democracy, 2004).

On the other hand, Marxism is a body of doctrine developed mainly by Karl Marx, which considers the religion to be the opium of the people. While it is clearly incompatible with Muslim nations, in the past, countries such as Egypt, Palestine, Lebanon, Algeria, Morocco, Iraq, Iran, and others have had experienced communist movements (Africa, 2014). It is noteworthy that Marxism had only a temporary hold in various Muslim countries due to their opinion on religion and their sympathies were mainly confined to the anti-imperialist national liberation thoughts during the post-colonial era (Ben Fowkes, 2009, p. 8).

Modernization seems as desired IR which would help Muslim countries to move forward. However, achieving modernity implies that one must leave behind traditional values in order to achieve an increased standard of living (Crossman, 2018). Islāmic teachings clearly reflect that there is no possibility of progress while denying or replacing the core Islāmic values and principles. Nationalism is the belief that people are divided into nations. Tribalism/ nationalism has a stronghold in Muslim nations and negatively affects the intended unity of the Muslim world. Loyalty to one's nationality in many instances overpowers the loyalty to Islām (Jaffry, 2010).

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

It seems that one of the biggest challenges in the Muslim world is to find and implement an appropriate IR theory to lead Muslim countries to political and social-economic stability and

prosperity without compromising Islāmic belief. Nevertheless, it is important to note a few key challenges that are prominent in the Muslim world. The main challenges faced by the Muslim world lie in its unity, education, cooperation, solidarity and identity. Lack of unity, quality education, and identity seems to be in congruence with the colonial era. While lack of cooperation and solidarity appeals to the selfishness of human nature, which is criticized in Islāmic teachings.

Unity

The Noble Qur'ān reveals that Allāh created mankind into nations and tribes (Qur'ān, 49:13) and that the strength of the Muslim world has always lied in its' unity (Qur'ān, 3:103). It is the intentional division of nations and tribes that has weakened it. The concept of nationalism and tribalism is completely alien to Islāmic teachings. The divide and rule strategy, also known as "divide and conquer strategy", which has been successfully applied by the Western society since 1492, which marks the fall of Granada as well as the beginning of colonization (Encyclopedia.com, 2008). The purpose of this strategy was to subdue the Muslim world and deprive it of any possibility to regain its strength after the fall of the Ottoman Empire (Alkhateeb, 2012). Unfortunately, the same strategy that was aimed to control and harm the Muslim Ummah is nourished and maintained by the Muslim world itself to this day.

Quality Education

Muslims, in their own eyes, consider their educational system to be under-qualified. Hence, anyone, who wishes to gain a more respectable education chooses to study in Western educational institutions (Lackey, 2013), which also means that they are exposed to ideas contrary to their beliefs. The academic religious education is largely considered inferior and extracurricular. Moreover, while Islāmization of sciences has been on the rise, it is yet to gain any significant value and application.

Cooperation

Considering the reality of the Muslim World and the fact that it is divided into nations and tribes, one would assume that since all share the same values and principles given by the religion; there would be at least a high level of cooperation (Qur'ān, 49:10). Unfortunately, while there is some cooperation at a very low level, it is nowhere near the necessary and visible level needed to have a positive impact on the global welfare of the Muslim world. The case of Palestine, which has marked 70 years since the Palestinian exodus, is a clear example of the lack of cooperation and support from the global Muslim world (Paq, 2018).

Solidarity

One of the pillars of Islām is to donate surplus wealth to the needy as well as the promotion of a charity. However, the analysis of the situation of the Muslim world clearly reflects the lavish spending of state money on luxury hotels and skyscrapers on one side (Taylor, 2011) and on the other people are dying of hunger (Daniel Nikbakht, Sheena McKenzie, CNN, 2018). This international policy and behavior go completely against Islāmic principles (Qur'ān, 17:26-27).

Identity

The colonial and post-colonial era is marked by a loss of identity of the colonized nations. As a result, Muslims today are still searching for their identity. In their quest, they are turning to what they consider be modern and advanced while rejecting or belittling their rich religious and cultural heritage. (Yasir Qadhi, Shariah Editor, 2018). Before the Muslim world can make any advancements, it needs to start believing that Allāh has given it all the necessary tools to succeed.

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4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

It is obvious from the current state of the Muslim world that the IR theories observable in the Muslim world are neither effective nor compatible with the Islāmic teachings as a whole. Thus, is it possible to consider Islām as a replacement of the current systems? Scholars of IR argue the position of Islām as the possible IR theory. Some concluded that the Islāmic IR is an expression of unattainable desire to go back to ancient times of prosperity and power, and they give it no value (Proctor, 1965). On the other hand, there are those who have looked at Islāmic IR in its complexity and concluded that it is considerable and valid IR theory (Turner, 2009). It is not important for the world of IR to recognize Islāmic IR as legitimate. Islāmic IR is a very rich and complex theory, which might not be very appealing to the non-Muslim world. However, it is absolutely suitable to be the IR theory of the Muslim world.

The Muslim world was born from a desert nation that spread its wings to all corners of the world and, after reaching its peak, dismantled into fragments of no significant impact or contribution to the development of the world's civilization. In recent times, there have been calls and attempts for Muslims to take back the lead under the banner of Islām. Nevertheless, despite these efforts, there is no Muslim country that plays an important role in the field of international politics. Today's state of the Muslim Ummah is defined by disunity, nationalism, corruption, competition, rising consumerism, and loss of the true Muslim identity. Muslim states are governed by policies alien to their religious and cultural heritage. In order to gain a globally respected leadership position, and political and socioeconomic stability and progress, Muslim countries need to implement the Islāmic IR theory with its appropriate interpretations. They have to consider it as a whole and not pick and choose what seems most appealing. They should understand and have confidence that success will only come while keeping as close to the Islāmic IR theory as possible. We have observed the flourishing state of those countries that have applied the Islāmic blueprint and, on the other hand, we have also witnessed the miserable state of those countries that have strayed from it. Hence, the tools for success are at their own disposal. Now, it is up to Muslims to determine their future.

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