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Nationalism and the long road to the Caliphate

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Almost 70 years has elapsed, since the last major conflict erupted in the West, which ended in 1945. All the signs indicate peace is likely to continue, as ties between the Western nations are strengthened through various treaties, reinforcing their allegiance to a common set of values. Europe in particular, there exists is a momentum towards greater unification; the European Union (EU) has evolved from the European Economic Community (EEC) that was formed back in 1957. After the recent ratification of the Lisbon Treaty, the EU has passed another milestone.

Note the pace of unity in Europe has taken into account the desire of each nation to maintain its national identity; without coercion or any form of threat or intimidation, they relinquish part of their sovereignty, for the greater good. This notion issue of pooling some national sovereignty for benefit was raised by former Conservative foreign secretary, Francis Pym, a proponent for European Union. In his book, "The Politics of Consent", he argued national sovereignty was less about territorial or national integrity, much more about the ability of a nation to determine the welfare of its own citizen.

After the demise of the Iron Curtain, the EU has continued to expand to incorporate the former Eastern European block countries. In addition to economic benefits, such expansion ensures the old fault lines of religion and ethnicity does not cause instability, which happened after the breakup of Yugoslavia. The West ended the conflict in 1995 through the Dayton peace accord. Now, Croatia and Macedonia are set to become part of the EU, for sure, Bosnia and Serbia will follow in the future. Germany has also signed a historic peace accord with Russia, turning a new chapter as they look to end the historic animosity between the two nations.

From Napoleon to Hitler, history tells us nationalism is the fuel of nation states, and one of the primary factors for causing numerous bloody wars. Yet, the nation states of Europe, USA, Canada, Russia and others have managed to maintain close ties, and avoid conflicts. Therefore, what has changed over the last 70 years in the West? This paradoxical behaviour can be attributed to the following reasons:

- With scientific advances, the ability to cause mutual destruction has increased significantly, making war very costly to all sides. This was recognised by the West after the First World War. Europe lamented on the mass casualties caused by the use of explosives, mustard gas, air raids, machine guns, and especially the gruesome trench battles, the most notable was the battle of the Somme. They said 'never again' and formed the "League of Nations" which was supposed to prevent future wars. The organisation failed, and subsequently the Second World War was ignited, which ended

with the Americans dropping the Atom bomb on the Japanese cities; this finally made the point about cost of wars. No wonder, the Third World War was a cold one.

- The experience of the great wars also propelled the West to find a solution to avert future wars; the obvious remedy was to forge unity amongst nations through establishing multilateral treaties and economic blocks. The creation of common market brings mutual economic benefit and in turn creates political stability. It generates opportunities for everyone. For example, those nation facing labour shortage, which is a crucial factor for economic growth, could access the labour force from other countries, where they may have been out of work. This in turn stimulates the local and the regional economy. Instead of fighting for spoils, the West has learnt to work together and share the benefit. Multinationals companies in some way reflect that ethos.
- At a political level, the Western democracies have been able to create stable government that is held accountable to the masses, where the rule of law prevails; it may not be perfect, but there is no other example in the world that can rival their record of accomplishment, since the end of Second World War. This helped to create internal stability, enabling the nations to forge a common ideological outlook and unify.

It seems the West has finally managed to tame primitive nationalism. Even countries like India with many racial groups, languages and religions has been relatively successful in maintaining unity, in comparison to the more monolithic Muslim nations of Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan.

In contrast, the Muslims nations have failed miserably, where primitive nationalism is so pervasive that they cannot unify even on nationalistic grounds. For example, the Arab League could not unify the Arabs at any level. Egypt did not think twice to abandon Arab unity and signed the peace treaty with Israel in 1979; similarly, the Arab nations sided with the US forces during the Iraq war, legitimised as American 'Jihad' no doubt! The ordinary Kuwaitis were waving and kissing the American flag, thanking the American 'Mujahideen' for expelling Saddam Hussein's army. Then collectively they imposed the brutal economic sanction on Iraq. After the removal of Saddam Hussein, Iraq split along racial and sectarian lines. The Palestinians to date are helpless, whenever the Israelis decide to slaughter them, the entire Arab world remain spectators, issuing condemnation after condemnation.

Elsewhere in the Islamic world, it's the same story, the bearded Afghans sided with the *Kafir* (disbeliever) Americans, and fought the fellow Muslims of Pashtun origin (Taliban). Of course, they will argue it was the American 'Mujahideen' helping them against the *Kafir* Taliban! East Pakistan seceded to become Bangladesh, after it could no longer maintain unity with West Pakistan. The Turks and the Kurds has been fighting a similar battle for decades. Recently, the barbaric killings driven by primitive nationalism was seen in Kyrgyzstan. One can go on listing numerous other conflicts amongst Muslims propelled by nationalism and intolerance of other racial groups. This is an irony given that nationalism contradicts the Islamic teachings, which demands that Muslims live as a unified body under one ruler: the caliphate. This is challenge, how do the Muslim nations overcome these nationalistic barriers and forge unity.

There are those who are oblivious to the real world, and ignorant of the history of the Caliphate, they purport that only the Caliphate will magically bring about

unity and remove nationalism. This is a poor assumption, as the history of the Caliphate shows otherwise. From the very early phase, the forces of nationalism was active, the battle between Muawiyah and Ali (ra) echoed the old rivalry between the two clans of, Banu Hashim and Banu Umayya. Muawiyah probably carried nationalistic sentiment as a late convert to Islam, who saw the supremacy of Islam, linked with the ascendancy of Banu Hashim over his tribe. Otherwise, he was destined to become the leader of Mecca. In addition, Ali had killed many prominent family members of the Banu Umayya during the earlier battles. Thus, most of the clans from Banu Umayya fled to Damascus, and joined Muawiyah to raise the revolt against Ali (ra) of Banu Hashim.

After the death of Ali (ra), Muawiyah and his son Yazid plotted to suppress the Banu Hashim clan; this policy led to the killing of the grandson of the Prophet at Karbala, concurrently the other prominent companions from Banu Hashim were silenced and confined to Medina. This paved the way for Banu Ummayh to dominated to dominate the Caliphate, so the Umayyad dynasty as born. Subsequently, they were succeeded by the rival Arab dynasty, the Abbasids, whose roots can be traced back to Banu Hashim.

The Arab Caliphate only produced Arab rulers, their outlook towards the non-Arab Muslims was coloured with prejudice, to the extent that non-Arab Muslims were made to pay the *Jizya* tax at one point that is reserved for non-Muslims. Tariq Bin Ziyad, the Berber Muslim general who conquered Spain was humiliated by the Arab Caliph of Damascus. Eventually, a costly civil war erupted between the Arab rulers and the Berbers of North Africa; otherwise, the frontiers of Islam would have reached the Scandinavian countries. The Ottomans were no different; they only produced Turkish rulers from their family, in the later phase they even gave primacy to the Turkish language over the Quranic Arabic texts.

There is no specific textual evidence that illustrates how the current Muslim nations can forge unity. One cannot cite the Prophet's reign, as he was the de facto leader of all Muslims. Nobody could setup a rival state without giving disobedience to the Prophet; therefore, at that time disunity was not possible without committing a grievous sin or apostasy. Therefore, one can only refer to historical examples as a guide. However, are there any examples of Muslims countries unifying with the Caliphate 'willingly'? Unfortunately, the initial fragmentation of the Caliphate increased with the passage of time. Any subsequent unification was brought through the use of force, and such methods will not work today for two reasons:

Firstly, the cost of war has increased substantially; it will be detrimental to the Muslims as a whole, the costs will outweigh the benefits.

Secondly, such unification will be short term, as the masses today are far more informed and politically aware; thus, unlikely to accept the authority of another nation.

The test of human history shows nationalism will not be eradicated, but it can be contained, as the West has done gradually over the last 70 years, and the Caliphate did in the early years. If states with a nationalistic ideology can unify, surely the Muslims should be able to achieve the same with ease, because the Islamic teachings commands the believers to unify and discard nationalism.

Many will point to the failures of organisations like the OIC (Organisation of Islamic Countries), but this can be largely attributed to the leadership of the post-colonial generation. As the new generation of leaders emerges in the Islamic world, unification will be easier if there is a collective effort. Like the unification of European countries, this has to be achieved gradually by setting modest objectives, and continue to build on their experience. If the nations cannot cooperate at a basic level, then to expect the nations to merge instantly is the height of naivety.

The Islamic movements and activists should act as a catalyst by gradually introducing Islam in society and government, based on Islamic teachings they should promote the concept of electing rulers who will be held accountable to the masses, where the rule of law prevails. In each country these movements should encourage their respective governments to strengthen their ties and start to pool some of their sovereignty for the collective benefit, with the ultimate aim of producing a single Caliphate.

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Published on 7/7/2010

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