GLOBALIZATION AND THE NATION-STATE

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I. INTRODUCTION: GLOBALIZATION - ITS NATURE AND SIGNIFICANCE.

In order to make as fair and accurate an assessment as may now be possible of the impact which Globalization has so far made, or may reasonably be expected to make in the foreseeable future, on the nation-state in general and in the Muslim World in particular, we first need to look, however briefly and synoptically, at Globalization. What is it? And, how does it function? Is there more to it than being just another "buzz word" of modern times?

A manifestly controversial and variously understood phenomenon, Globalization may be briefly described as all those processes - technological, economic and financial, as well as political, social and cultural - in consequence of which space ship earth and all its inhabitants have recently been transformed, with hitherto unprecedented speed, into what is, in effect, a single relatively distance less and borderless planetary village.

As such Globalization is an essentially new phenomenon which available evidence strongly suggests goes back to the 1980s or, at most, a decade or two earlier.
To this however some have objected, arguing instead, that the process of global unification and transformation under consideration has been in progress, at least, since the age of European discoveries in the fifteenth century.

Yet others would have us believe that Globalization has a very much longer history. Thus a Japanese scholar recently addressing a predominantly Muslim audience at Cairo University suggested that it was the rise of Islam in the seventh century A.D. that marked the beginning of Globalization. And writing two years before, Professor Ali Mazrui, also referred to what he called the “Globalization of Islam” and “the Globalization of Christianity” saying that the latter started with the conversion of Emperor Constantine in 313 A.D.¹

With all due respect to distinguished colleagues and friends however, it seems uncontestable that a less poetic approach to the subject would clearly reveal that, although historical epochs do often overlap and intertwine, and the Age of Globalization is therefore inconceivable in isolation from the many important economic, scientific and technological developments which preceded it, especially since the industrial revolution - Globalization is characterized by a number of distinctive features which clearly mark it off from earlier epochs of history.

Prominent among these features, which mark Globalization off from earlier phases in history and make it a distinctively modern - even contemporary - phenomenon, are the following:

i) The transformation of global trade and financial transactions, mostly carried out by gigantic Trans-National Corporations (TNCs) on such massive scales and at such speed, that time, distances and traditional state boundaries no longer count for much.

With far more than a trillion dollars turnover each day on global currency markets and vast amounts of capital being transferred from one side of the world to another at the click of a mouse, the world economy today, it has correctly been said, is vastly different: not only from that of the distant past, but even from what it used to be as recently as the 1980s.²

ii) But electronic communications - together with modern means of transportation whether by sea, land or air - have not only revolutionized the world economy; they have also transformed the socio-cultural scene the world over. Values, tastes and life styles are being homogenized and a cosmopolitan global culture is fast developing. It is not only that the world is being inexorably McDonalized and Coca-Colaized; family values and traditional cultures - including those of Islam and the Muslim World - are
being tested and challenged everywhere and every minute around the clock.

This, also, is a new and unprecedented situation in world history.\(^3\)

It is because of the awareness of the novelty of the situation on account of these and related developments - some of which we shall presently consider - that the term Globalization was first coined to indicate the new phenomenon.\(^4\)

Some two hundred years ago the world at large and Europe in particular experienced a similarly radical transformation. Sensitive and discerning minds became increasingly aware that a new phase in history was then being ushered in: a phase in which nationalism and the nation-state were emerging as the predominant forms of political organization in place of the hitherto familiar feudal system. To mark the change, especially with regard to relations between the emerging nation-states, Jeremy Bentham then coined the phrase “inter-national” relations; i.e. relations between nation-state; which, incidentally, is perhaps more accurately reflected in the Farsi term *baynal milali* than it is in the Arabic *al-’alaqat al-dawaliyya* or *al-’alaqat al-’alamiyya*.

Today however the nation-state with its attendant hallmarks of territorial boundaries and national sovereignty is in many ways being severely challenged, if not actually superceded, by global forces with which neither boundaries nor sovereignty count for much. The term ‘Globalization’ has been coined to designate and reflect this new reality - much in the same way as “international relations” had been in the 1780s; i.e. about two hundred years earlier.\(^5\)

This brings us to the second part of our subject.

**II. THE NATION STATE**

For well over three hundred years until the present day, the nation-state has been - and to a large extent remains - the most widely, if not universally, accepted form of governance. Today the U.N. has 194 member states: big and small, rich and poor, strong or weak - but all formally regarded as equal members of the world body.

Be that as it may, the nation-state, it is important to remember, is Western, more specifically West European, by origin. From Europe, and very much under European influence, notions of nationalism and the nation-state spread to other parts of the world - including the Muslim world.
Although modified in various ways and to greater or lesser extents in order to fit different local conditions around the globe however, the nation-state everywhere continues to be characterized, above all, by certain traits and attributes which reflect - in various ways and varying degrees - the European origins from which it first sprang.

Generally described as The Westphalia System (after The Peace of Westphalia, 1648) the most important characteristics of the nation-state as it has since evolved may be briefly indicated as follows:

1. Territoriality: i.e. the state is separated from other states by clearly defined borders or frontiers.

2. Sovereignty: meaning that the state (in modern times a formally organized and often centralized public authority) exercises comprehensive, supreme and exclusive control over its designated territorial domain.

3. As a heritage of the Age of Revolution (American, French etc) the state - especially and less incredibly in liberal democratic countries - is considered to be the representative of 'the people' or 'the nation' whose consent gives legitimacy to the state and its actions.  

4. A major heritage of the conflicts of Church and state, of ecclesiastic authorities and scientific enquiry, and of the bitter and prolonged religious wars in Europe, is that the modern state tends to be, to a greater or lesser extent, secular: a tendency which, when transmitted to the Muslim World in particular, has precipitated some highly divisive and controversial consequences.

III. IMPACT OF GLOBALIZATION ON THE NATION-STATE

As has already been indicated the classical conceptualization of the nation-state has had to be modified in many respects with the passage of time - even before the coming of Globalization. With Globalization setting in, the situation has been largely transformed giving rise, inter alia, to a widely held perception that the nation-state with its various characteristic features is fast becoming a relic of the past - if it has not already been buried and done away with. Among the most important factors, which have given rise to the new situation, are the following:

First, and in terms of political and strategic considerations, the emergence and subsequent proliferation of such supranational structures as the European Union, NATO and SEATO, and of such international bodies as the World Bank, IMF and GATT, has made it necessary for states to qualify or
compromise over sovereignty in order to make it possible for member states in the said organizations to work together. This has resulted in the inexorable, if gradual, “erosion of sovereignty” as it has been designated, perhaps somewhat pessimistically, by some - and hence, according to these, the decline of the nation-state itself.\(^8\)

Secondly, and in terms of economic activities, the progressive internationalization of such key factors as communications, production, trade and finance - coupled with the growth world wide of Trans-National Corporations (TNCs) in unison - have made it increasingly difficult, if not impossible, for states to manage autonomous national economies. Issues of central importance in the national economics of states (such as employment and monetary and fiscal policies of governments) can no longer be settled without due consideration of regional, international or transnational factors and players. Accordingly, the eminent Japanese international business analyst, Kenichi Ohmae, has argued that, in fact, the nation-state is already well on the way to becoming “a nostalgic fiction”.\(^9\)

In support of Ohmae’s point of view - though not necessarily going as far as he has done - it can be added, thirdly, that even cultural and educational matters, traditionally national concerns par excellence, can no longer be regarded as exclusive domains of the nation-state. The growth of global mass media and of electronic communications has detracted from the nation-state’s domination over information and language education. Consequently, “important cultural and psychological underpinnings of sovereignty”\(^10\) have been loosened - with serious implications for such basic and sensitive issues as loyalty and identity.\(^11\) The problems arising in this connection tend to become particularly acute and complex in Muslim and Third World countries as a result of the generally excessive reliance of local media on foreign, especially Western, sources and news media even when reporting on Islamic or Third World issues. Not surprisingly therefore the final - and tragic, or tragic-comic - outcome of such dependence on foreign sources is that recipients tend to see their neighbours, their compatriots - and even themselves - through foreign eyes, and to act accordingly.

Cultural imperialism to which Muslim - and Third World - peoples at large are thus subjected has been incisively analyzed by James Petras in an article, which is well worth noting in this connection. Having pointed out that, while imperial arms destroy civil society and banks and multi-nationals pillage the economics of Third World countries, cultural colonialism, he argues, seeks to destroy national identities and rupture the solidarity of communities by, among other things, promoting the cult of “modernity” as conformity with external symbols, attacking social bonds in the name of “individuality”, and desensitizing the public to make mass murder by Western states (such as mass bombings in Iraq and so called “targeted killing” of people in occupied Palestinian territories) routine, acceptable activities. “Cultural terrorism”, Petras continues, by preying on the
psychological weaknesses and deep anxieties of vulnerable Third World peoples, particularly their sense of being "backward", "traditional" and oppressed, projects new images of "mobility" and "free expression", destroying old bonds of family and community, while fastening new chains of arbitrary authority linked to corporate power and commercial markets... Cultural imperialism questions all pre-existing relations that are obstacles to the one and only sacred modern deity: the market... It has [thus] become fashionable to evoke terms like "globalization" or "internationalization" to justify attacks on any or all forms of solidarity, community and/or social values.\textsuperscript{12}

The inability of nation-states to cope - individually and independently - with many of today's challenging circumstances is clearly demonstrated, fourthly, in connection with a wide range of climatic and environmental problems such as those of the ozone layer, biodiversity, and the pollution of air and water around the globe. It is obvious that such problems cannot be effectively dealt with by states acting separately. Cooperation on a global scale - even if it means compromising over the exercise of sovereignty - is clearly imperative.\textsuperscript{13}

The same is true with regard to combating such pandemic diseases as AIDS, and such internationally organized forms of crime as dealing in narcotics and sex slavery. Collective action on the part of all states is essential for meeting global challenges in these and similar fields as well.

Developments in international law, especially since the Second World War and in connection with the protection of Human Rights in particular, have in the meantime added a fifth 'gap'\textsuperscript{14} between the classical theory of sovereignty and its practice today. Three major landmarks are particularly worth mentioning in this connection. First amongst these is the International Tribunal at Nuremberg which laid down, for the first time in history, that when state laws happen to be in conflict with international laws that protect basic humanitarian values, individual persons must transgress the former in favour of the latter - except where there is no room for 'moral choice'.\textsuperscript{15} Concerned to take the first steps for the collective enforcement of certain of the Rights contained in the UN Declaration of 1947, the European convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (1950), for the first-time, gave individual citizens the right in principle to initiate proceedings against their governments.\textsuperscript{16} That meant, in the words of Professor Capotorti, that the state is no longer "free to treat its own citizens as it thinks fit".\textsuperscript{17} This position was further reinforced by the subsequent adoption at the U.N. and elsewhere of a series of resolutions and conventions whereby humanitarian intervention was in certain cases sanctioned "for the sole purpose of preventing or putting a halt to a serious violation of fundamental human rights, in particular the right to life of persons, regardless of their nationality".\textsuperscript{18}
The potency of these changes in defending human rights at the international level was dramatically demonstrated in December 1998, almost exactly fifty years after the promulgation of the Universal Declaration, in connection with the arrest and subsequent trial of General Augusto Pinochet, the former President of Chile. The Pinochet case was momentous, as one commentator put it, because it was in that connection that "sovereign immunity" was, for the first time, decisively and unequivocally "not allowed to become sovereign impunity".\(^{19}\)

In view of the many and important developments which have thus taken place in the economic, legal, political and cultural powers and functions of the nation-state since the Westphalia System was first established and, more especially in recent times, under the impact of Globalization, some observers, as has been indicated above, have concluded that the nation-state is now a mere relic of the past; and that national sovereignty, whatever its origins and significance in days gone by, is today little more than juridical and political fiction.

Closer and, it may not be out of place to add, calmer and less agitated, examination of the evidence, however, clearly shows that - although classical conceptualizations of sovereignty \textit{a la} Bodin, Hobbes and Rousseau for example, are no longer viable, the principle of sovereignty itself has not been jettisoned; also that, although the nature (meaning: role, powers and functions) of the nation-state may have changed or even been transformed in certain respects, the nation-state itself has undoubtedly survived and continues to function as a major instrument of government in today’s rapidly changing world. Thus, it has been correctly suggested, “the willing surrender” of aspects of sovereignty by, for example, member states of the European Union, has facilitated the survival of European nation-states faced, on the one hand, with dominance of the U.S.A. in the first three decades following World War II and the rise of the Japanese economic challenge on the other.\(^{20}\) Another writer - who, significantly, speaks about the “pooling” of sovereignty in the E.U. rather than the “erosion” thereof - rightly says that “the nation state survives even though some of its powers have to be pooled with others, and even though many apparently sovereign decisions are seriously constrained, or made ineffective, by the decisions of others as well as by economic trends uncontrolled by anyone”. Going further, he then continues, saying that the European community in fact helps “.... the state survive, by providing a modicum of predictability and a variety of rewards ... [it has] strengthened the nation-state’s capacity to act at home and abroad.”\(^{21}\)

A well argued and much more up-to-date assessment of the situation as it has evolved until the year 2000 AD considers future prospects as well concluding that: “As the source of order and basis of governance, the state will remain in the future as effective, and will be as essential, as it has ever been.”\(^{22}\)
It goes without saying that we need not commit ourselves in absolute or unqualified terms to any particular projection about the long-term prospects of the nation-state or for that matter of any other form of political association. What can - and, in the light of the evidence available today, should - be clearly and unhesitatingly said is that Globalization, thus far, has not brought about the demise of the nation-state - whether in Europe or elsewhere. And, although the situation would undoubtedly continue to evolve, and in perhaps unpredictable ways too, it is not likely that the existence of either the nation-state or of the principle of sovereignty will, in the foreseeable future, be in jeopardy.

IV. GLOBALIZATION AND THE NATION-STATE IN THE MUSLIM WORLD: A BIRD's EYE-VIEW

What has been said above about the durability of the nation-state, despite the fact that it has had to undergo many changes, in the Age of Globalization may - in very general terms - be said to apply to the nation-state in the Muslim World as well.

However, a number of factors - some of which are traceable to earlier phases in history - have together rendered the nation-state in the Muslim World generally weaker and more vulnerable to penetration, manipulation and domination: not only by super powers and middle range states, but also by Trans-National Companies and other global forces.

1. One of the said factors is that the legitimacy of the nation-state in the Muslim World has, from the very beginning, been challenged - and continues to be challenged - on ideological grounds, and from several different angles. Thus from a general Islamic (not necessarily radical Islamist) point of view, nationalism and the nation-state having been introduced from outside, continue to be widely regarded throughout the Muslim World, as artificial and divisive foreign implants vis-à-vis the deep rooted traditional bonds of the Umma and universal Muslim solidarity. The fact that, true to their European origins, nationalism and the nation-state in the Muslim World tend to be secular to a greater or lesser extent, has in many cases accentuated the schism.23

Nationalism was however to a large extent legitimized throughout the Muslim World as a result of the involvement of numerous groups and individuals, across ethnic and religious boundaries, in the struggle for independence from colonial (non-Muslim) rule, which, for many Muslims, meant that the said struggle was a form of jihad.24

Faced, in the Middle East for example, by a situation after independence where secular - sometimes radically secular - Turkish or Arab nationalists emerged as ruling elites and dominant groups, other communities which
had whole heartedly thrown their weight behind the movements for independence, then felt that they had to continue the struggle for the independence of their particular, non-Arab or non-Turkish communities against what they then perceived, also on secular nationalist basis, as "internal colonialism". The Kurds in Turkey and Iraq and the Berbers in Morocco and Algeria are clear examples of this position. As Muslims and full-fledged-often leading or ruling - members of the Umma they had, for centuries, enjoyed remarkably harmonious and fraternal relations with their respective Turkish, Arab and other neighbours and fellow Muslims. As members of different nationalities in a predominantly secular post-independence era however, they - in general - continue fighting for objectives, which vary from seeking official recognition of a particular language or cultural heritage, through regional autonomy to self-determination, separation and complete independence.

Another ideological challenge to the legitimacy of the nation-state in the Muslim World and elsewhere has been (it is no longer a great force) that of the Marxists. For these, national independence and the national revolution in general, though important elements in the global anti-imperialist struggle are, at best, stepping stones on the long and arduous road which Marxists maintained would eventually lead to the overthrow of world capitalism (along with its agents and lackies at the national level), the victory of the international proletarian revolution and - ultimately - the establishment of communism: not bourgeois nationalism. For this was bound to betray the proletariat and hinder the progress of mankind to what Marxists perceived was the final liberation of man.

2. Ideological disputations apart, the legitimacy of the nation-state in the post-independence Muslim World in general seems to have been diminished in consequence, mainly, of its own failure to deliver. For, with a few exceptions - some owing to the abundance of natural resources developed and managed by Trans-National Corporations rather than of local ingenuity in management and development - the nation-states of the Muslim World (often oppressive, incompetent and corrupt at the same time) have not been remarkably successful either in the administration of internal matters, or in the management of external affairs. A lot can be said by way of elaboration and illustration of this point. Suffice it to note in this brief statement on a complex and many-sided subject that - despite the teeming millions of inhabitants and the abundant natural resources of the Muslim World - not a single Muslim nation-state figures among the advanced countries of the world.

Not surprisingly therefore the performance of Muslim nation-states in the arena of international affairs - even in connection with such universally recognized issues of general Muslim concern as Palestine, Kashmir and Muslim minorities around the globe - continues to be almost unbelievably poor and puerile.
3. The situation is rendered even worse as a result of the fact that Muslim nation-states, though they obviously need the support and assistance of each other and over a wide range of vitally important issues, do not only fail to cooperate with each other, to the detriment of them all; some actually attack and fight each other. And this sometimes for reasons of their own, some other times as a result of prodding and manipulation on the part of alien forces or interests which have no love or respect for any of them.

V. SOME CONCLUDING REMARKS

It should be said, by way of conclusion, that a lot of deep and creative thinking as well as a lot of hard and selfless work, are needed in order to bring an end to the dismal situation in which the peoples and nation-states of the Muslim World are ensnared today, so as to establish a new Muslim World order worthy of the peoples and the states of the *Umma*. Among the many issues that need to be explored in depth, the following may be worthy of some special consideration:

1. The need for acquiring a clear and profound understanding of Globalization as well as of the many other forces that govern the world and make it what it is today.

2. The need to understand that whether we will benefit from Globalization or be harmed by its negative aspects depends on us: our wills and the choices we make.

3. The need, throughout the Muslim world, for the establishment of good governance - including, especially, effective participation, transparency, accountability, efficiency and, above all, respect for Human Rights and the rule of law.

4. The need for rapid and sustainable development: human, economic, scientific and technological including, especially, information technology. The point has often and quite rightly been made (by H.E. the Prime Minister of Malaysia, among others) that it was a most regrettable and damaging fact that the Muslim World missed the Industrial Revolution; and that it would be little less than tragic if the Muslim World were to miss out on the ongoing revolution of information technology as well.

5. The need for well thought out and continued cooperation with Muslim and non-Muslim peoples and states who are equally committed to the cause of creating a better future for mankind the world over.

It is needless to say that any contribution to the revival of the *Umma* along such lines would constitute an act of the highest moral worth, in traditional Islamic terminology: a true *jihad* indeed.
END NOTES


4. Citing *The Economist* (4/4/59) and The OED, 1989 s.v. global, Waters states that although the word ‘global’ is over 400 years old the common usage of such derivatives as ‘globalize’ and ‘globalization’ did not begin until about 1960; and in 1961 Webster became the first major dictionary to offer definitions of globalism and globalization. Cf. Waters, op. cit. p 2.


7. See, for example, the present writer’s *Al-Islam wa’l qawmiyya fi’l sahriq al-awsat (Hilvar, Beirut and Hadarat al-Islam, Damascus)* 1963; and *The Development of Fiqh in the Modern Muslim World*, Kuala Lumpur, 1996.


11. Hence, for example, the heated nation-wide debates which took place in Egypt throughout the summer months of this year, 2001, especially in connection with the question of dual nationality and its implications for national security. The Supreme Court’s decision, taken towards the end of August, whereby the membership in Parliament of a certain businessman has been declared null and void because of his dual (French-Egyptian) nationality, is likely to keep the controversy alive for at least several months to come. Cf. http://www.asharqalawsat.com/pedaily/28-08-2001/leader/9.html Also, al-Ahram, http://www.ahram.org.eg/arab/ahram/2001/9/5/OPIN3.htm.


16. Ibid.


Some of these themes have been discussed in the publications cited in footnote 8 above.

24 It is interesting to note in this connection that, in the Arab parts of the Muslim World, the term "al-jihad al-watani" (ie national jihad) was widely used: Habib Bourgiba of Tunisia, by no means an Islamist, was designated "al-Mujahid al-akbar"; even Kemal Ataturk had the specifically Islamic title "Ghazi" conferred on him while, in the Sudan, the memoirs of Sayyid ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Mahdi, for long the champion of national independence, were published by his grandson, Sayyid al-Sadiq, with the title *jihad fi sabil al-istiqlal* (ie jihad for independence).