

## **The Muslim Perspective on Western Attitudes to Islamic Unity**

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The unity of the Muslim World has remained a prominent issue in Islamic thought and of great concern to Muslims since the first split at the end of the Righteous Caliphs. Despite the agreement among Muslims on the need for unity, it has faced serious challenges since Muslims divided into factions and groups within different political entities, the most important of which was the Ottoman Empire. Attempts to restore the caliphate, or to gather Muslim countries into one international organization, or even to hold a meeting between the leaders of Islamic countries to discuss issues of Islamic unity, had not succeeded until the fire of the Al-Aqsa Mosque in 1969. Given the importance of Islamic unity, which has become an ideology advocated by many Muslim intellectuals today, Muslim views of foreign powers' attitudes toward this sensitive issue have been an important factor in shaping Islamic opinion. This is particularly so with regard to the West, which exceeded other foreign powers in its depth of interaction with the Muslim World, whether such interactions were ones of cooperation or conflict.

This paper discusses the impact of Muslim views on Western attitudes to Islamic unity by analyzing four perceptions of the West in the minds of many Muslims. These perceptions are linked to specific important stages in the historical interaction between Muslims and the West. The first stage was the exploitation by Western powers of trading capitulations granted by the Ottoman Empire to nationals of certain European countries; the

second stage was the Western colonization of Muslim countries and the rise of the Islamic League in response to the challenge of colonialism and the disunity of Muslims; the third stage was the accusation that Western colonial powers were trying to prevent the restoration of the Caliphate after the fall of the Ottoman Empire; and the fourth stage was the accusation that those powers were obstructing the territorial integrity of Islamic countries under colonial rule and that the West during the Cold War prevented the convergence of Islamic countries unless it served Western objectives. Thus, this paper presents additional research on Muslims' general perspective of the West and its attitudes to Islamic unity in particular, Islamic relations with the West and Islamic political unity.<sup>1</sup>

The focus on these stages and the resulting negative perceptions of the West in the minds of many Muslims does not mean that Muslims have no positive opinions of the West. Even before the first stage, many Muslims saw the West as an example of renaissance and progress. This is evident in the writings of early students who were sent on scholarships to study in the West in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, such as Rafa'ah Al-Tahtawi and Ali Mubarak. Tahtawi found that, "Western countries reached the highest standards of skill in mathematical, natural and metaphysical sciences, their origins and branches," and that they "abounded in various types of knowledge and literature which no-one denies that they bring about affability and adorn architecture."<sup>2</sup> After his return to Egypt he was keen to translate this knowledge into Arabic through the School of Languages, which played a prominent role in the evolution of the translation and Arabization movement.<sup>3</sup> Ali Al-Mubarak contended that the city of Paris in particular "was characterized by progress and the great number of authors. It was the destination of many people from Europe ... It had thinkers whose books spread into other countries and rid themselves of the darkness of ignorance and were distinguished from others by reason."<sup>4</sup> This positive outlook continued with many students on scholarships even after the crystallization of critical opinion of the West in the minds of many Muslims, as shown for example in *The Book of Days (Ayyam)*, by Taha Hussein. However, the focus on negative images of the West is the start of a corrective reassessment by both Muslims and the West, as

shown in the conclusion. This study does not suggest an inevitable contradiction between the unity of Muslims and a positive relationship with the West, but adds a new dimension to the interpretation of the attitudes – negative or positive – of Muslims toward the West today. This helps those advocates of cultural dialogue between Muslims and the West to pay attention to the sensitivity of the issue of unity among Muslims and help such a dialogue succeed.

### *First Stage: Western Trade*

#### *Capitulations Dismantle the Ottoman Empire*

Towards the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century the Ottoman Sultans began to grant certain European countries trade capitulations which were originally only granted to citizens of Italian cities – such as the city of Venice – who traded with the cities of the Ottoman Empire. Naples obtained these capitulations in 1498, France in 1535 (and again in 1569), Poland in 1553, England in 1580, and the Netherlands in 1612. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, additional European countries also received such privileges, including the Holy Roman Empire (1718), Sweden (1736), the Kingdom of Two Sicilies (1740), Tuscany, Hamburg and Lubeck (1747), Denmark (1756), Prussia (1761), and Spain (1780). However, after several centuries of this practice a number of Ottoman religious scholars opposed the extensive granting of trade capitulations to Western traders. This was due not only to the result of these capitulations becoming a heavy burden on the deteriorating Ottoman economy and a tool to protect illegal practices such as the white slave trade, but also to an increase in the use of these capitulations as a justification for foreign intervention in the affairs of the Ottoman Empire that negatively impacted territorial unity and populations. After being granted capitulations, Western countries established diplomatic missions and commercial agencies throughout the Ottoman Empire. The function of these missions and agencies at a time of weakness in the Ottoman Empire included the protection of certain religious minorities. An example of this took place in the 19<sup>th</sup> century around Mount Lebanon when France protected the Maronite Catholics,

Britain the Druze, and Russia the Orthodox Christians, even though all were Ottoman nationals.

Although foreign capitulations were a result of relaxed Ottoman–Western relations, they were not a manifestation of submission by the Ottoman Empire to Western nations. One cannot say that foreign capitulations from the beginning were meant to allow Western powers the opportunity to intervene in the affairs of the Ottoman Empire and historical linguistic analysis refutes this view. In terms of linguistics, the Arabic word *imtiyazat* is a translation of the English term ‘capitulations’ which assumes the existence of two parties between whom there is an unequal relationship exploited by the stronger party to achieve their interests at the expense of the weaker party. The English term suggests that European countries were exploiting the Ottoman State which granted these capitulations to them. However, the Turkish word synonymous with the English term is *Ahdname*, which is derived from the Persian language. This Turkish description does not carry any negative connotation for the party granting capitulations or pledges.

Historically, the European traders sought pledges of security or immunity from the Ottoman authorities when entering the country and allowed to stay for one year, although overstaying did not result in any negative consequences. Under the pledge of immunity, European traders would be exempt from all Ottoman taxes, including the poll tax on non-Muslims residing in the State, except for customs duties. While the duration of the covenant would end at the death of the Sultan who had granted it, traditionally it continued to be effective in the reign of his successors. Later sultans added privileges to pledges of immunity to include promises of protection. The pledge would grant trade capitulations to nationals of foreign countries that approach the Sultan in return for commitments by the rulers of those nations to friendship with the Ottoman Empire, and even sometimes loyalty and submission to it, as is clearly stated in the covenant which gave British traders capitulations in 1580. The covenant was not issued in the form of an agreement between the Ottoman state and the foreign state seeking to obtain capitulations; it was issued by the Ottoman Sultan (and the Persian Shah also later) in order to

encourage and secure trade between the Ottoman Empire and the state concerned and to achieve political goals. Capitulations were acts of sovereignty, an initiative made by the Sultan to the rulers of Europe who had been courting the Ottoman seat of power in order to establish official relations with the Ottoman Empire and ensure the safety of trade with it. It is therefore not surprising that the Sultans did not give any covenants or privileges to nationals of its arch-enemies, the Russian and Austrian empires, even after they inflicted on the Ottoman Empire several humiliating military defeats.

European countries were eager for such privileges because of the strong competition among them to monopolize trade in the ports of the eastern Mediterranean and the desire to get the support of the Ottoman Empire in their struggles against enemies. In the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries the pursuit by the rising European powers (especially France, England and the Netherlands) of such covenants intensified for economic and strategic reasons, including the desire for the friendship of the Sultan and his support against their common enemy, namely the Habsburg dynasty which ruled the Austrian Empire and several other countries in western Europe. These capitulations opened up for European traders the large and stable markets of the Ottoman Empire as well as the overland route to the East (especially Persia, India and China). This trade development was reflected in the prosperity of the European countries concerned and their increase in strength helped them to circumvent the Portuguese, who had closed the Red Sea and the Arabian Gulf and monopolized trade with the countries of the Orient via the sea route around the Cape of Good Hope.<sup>5</sup> In summary, the negative image of the West in the minds of many Muslims was reinforced by the behavior of Western nations with regard to the Ottoman Empire, enabling those countries to achieve huge commercial gain by opening up the Ottoman markets to their advantage. However, these countries also sought to dismantle the Ottoman Empire by exploiting the foreign concessions conferred upon them.

The reaction of Muslims to this Western behavior can be understood in light of positive Muslim opinion of the Ottoman Empire, which united under its flag a large portion of the world's Muslims. For example, the

followers of the Sufi Senussi order in North Africa remained loyal to the Ottoman Empire and collaborated with the representatives of its authority.<sup>6</sup> When France attacked Algeria in 1830, the Algerian ruler announced his loyalty to the Ottoman Sultan asking him for support.<sup>7</sup> During the following 80 years refugees from Algeria arrived in Ottoman territories to secure their protection.<sup>8</sup> The leaders of the Orabi Revolution in Egypt (1881–1882) declared their allegiance to the Ottoman Sultan despite their refusal of the Ottoman army's intervention in the struggle with the Khedive Tawfiq, backed by British troops.<sup>9</sup> Regardless of challenges by certain state governors to Ottoman authority politically and militarily – for example the governor of Egypt, Muhammad Ali Pasha (1805–1848), whose army defeated the Ottoman army in Asia Minor in 1839 – none of them had seceded from the Ottoman Empire or sought to overthrow it, but rather sought to maximize their control and governance within it.<sup>10</sup>

This positive view of the Ottoman Empire was reinforced when Sultan Abdul Hamid II adopted the idea of the Islamic University as a basis for state policy toward Muslims.<sup>11</sup> He added to the Ottoman Constitution of 1876 his capacity as a Caliph of Muslims and used this title so frequently that he surpassed in stature most of his predecessors—the Sultans of Al-Othman. Sheikh Jamal Al-Din Al-Afghani sought to bring the two sects Sunni and Shiite together and unify Muslims around the banner of the Ottoman Empire. He succeeded in reducing the hostility of the Qajar state in Persia to the Ottoman Empire enough so that Shah Muzaffar Al-Din and a number of Shiite clerics did not oppose the idea of an Islamic League under the Ottoman Sultan.<sup>12</sup> In light of this loyalty, any attack against the Ottoman Empire would entail a hostile aggressor. The West played this hostile role twice in that period, once when he sought to dismantle the Ottoman Empire by using the card of religious minorities taking advantage of foreign capitulations obtained by Western traders in the Ottoman Empire; and the second when it dismantled the Ottoman Empire through colonialism of many Muslim countries that were not subject to the rule of the Ottoman Empire.

*Second Stage: The West Colonizes  
the Muslim World and Destroys its Unity*

By the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, most non-Arab Muslim countries had already fallen into the clutches of Western colonialism. The Netherlands occupied the East Indies (now Indonesia); Britain occupied India; and Russia and China shared the occupation of Muslim countries of Central Asia known as Turkestan. The negative image of the West began to take root in the minds of Muslims who viewed it as an enemy seeking to exploit their wealth and tear apart their unity. To meet this Western challenge and thwart its objectives, Muslims called on each other for unity or cooperation at the very least. In this context, the population of the colonized countries, particularly in Central Asia, India and the island of Sumatra, showed loyalty to the Ottoman Empire, which was the most powerful Islamic country and the most supportive of the Muslims even outside the scope of its sovereignty and they hoped that the Ottoman Empire would support their struggle against colonialism morally, diplomatically and perhaps militarily.<sup>13</sup> For example, Imam Shamil – the commander of the Muslim mujahideen against the Russian invasion of Dagestan – sought the support of the Ottoman Sultan;<sup>14</sup> the refugees of Dagestan in the Ottoman Empire issued calls for intervention to support the Mujahideen of their country.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, Prince Jacob – the commander of the Muslim mujahideen against the Chinese invasion of East Turkistan – declared loyalty to the Ottoman Sultan as Caliph of Muslims in the hope of obtaining military support from the Ottoman Empire. In India, too, local sultans who were fighting against British colonial rule tried to obtain the support of the Ottoman Sultan.<sup>16</sup> The Ottoman Empire responded positively to many of these and other appeals and issued a number of directives to some of its governors of powerful and rich regions, such as Egypt, to support those who asked for help. However, this response came in varying degrees and was not enough to repel the fierce imperialist aggression and consequently more Muslim countries submitted to direct and indirect colonialism; Britain occupied

the Malay peninsula and shared the influence of Russia in Persia while controlling Afghan territory on its own.<sup>17</sup>

Moreover, Sultan Abdul Hamid showed the Ottoman Empire's weakness when he requested for the first time assistance from Muslims who were not under its jurisdiction rather than help them overcome the major difficulties they were facing.<sup>18</sup> For example, during the Ottoman–Greek war in 1897, the Ottoman Sultan demanded support from the Muslims of India and Egypt, which were under British occupation in spite of being nominally subject to the Ottoman state.<sup>19</sup> He also called on all Muslims to contribute to the fund-raising campaign launched to build a railway connecting Damascus with Hijaz to serve pilgrims, among other purposes; the Sultan himself had contributed a large sum to that campaign.<sup>20</sup> Despite the belief of Sultan Abdul Hamid II that the Muslims under colonial rule were ready to revolt against it if he declared jihad to liberate them,<sup>21</sup> he did not make such a declaration even in the former Ottoman states that were now occupied by Western colonialists. His argument was that if he had fought the British forces in Egypt, for example, he would have lost other regions in his empire such as Palestine or Iraq. By the same logic he refused to provide military support for Tunisia against the invading French forces under the pretext that he might lose other regions such as Syria.<sup>22</sup>

The inability of the Ottoman Empire to face down the Western challenge, its defeat by Russia in 1877 and ceding its territories in the Caucasus, resulted in the decline of the Ottoman Empire's stature among Muslims. Such a decline was evident in the emergence of two conflicting images of the empire in the writings of many Muslim reformist thinkers at that time. The first image was that of the Islamic Caliphate, for which loyalty is a must while defending it against its enemies at home and abroad and seeking to reform any corruption in it. The second image is that of a stumbling block to the advancement of Muslims and revival of the way of the righteous caliphate. These two contradictory images were reflected in the attitudes of intellectuals toward the Ottoman Empire. For example, Jamaluddin Al-Afghani declared loyalty to Sultan Abdul Hamid II as Caliph of Muslims, then he gave up his pledge of allegiance to him at

the end of his life.<sup>23</sup> Sheikh Mohammed Abdu also considered the Ottoman Empire the protector of the sanctuary of Islam,<sup>24</sup> praising Sultan Abdul Hamid II because he believed that the Sultan was determined to save the Muslims, but he changed his mind and attacked his policy after his return to Egypt.<sup>25</sup> What concerns us here is the link between the visions of these thinkers of the Ottoman Empire and their loyalty to, and imitation of, the West and the empire's inability to protect and support Muslims who face the aggression and colonialism of the West.<sup>26</sup> Al-Afghani criticized the Ottoman Sultan because he had sought help from some Christians and appointed them to the highest positions despite their primary allegiance to the West.<sup>27</sup>

However, Muslim reformist thinkers at that time did not agree on a single negative image of the West; rather, they had two contradictory images of the West. The first is that of an enemy that colonizes Muslim countries, plunders their resources, oppresses their populations, seeks to corrupt them and cast doubt on their religion; and the second is the example that should be emulated to achieve power, dignity and progress. Jamaluddin Afghani struggled against the forces of Western colonialism, especially Britain, and sought to liberate Muslim countries from colonization.<sup>28</sup> Therefore, he helped to counter their growing influence in Iran, which resulted in a popular campaign supported by religious scholars for a boycott of English tobacco.<sup>29</sup> After his return from exile, Sheikh Mohammed Abdu chose to work on education reform, yet did not take part in the struggle against British colonial rule although he began his political activity by supporting the Orabi revolution in Egypt and the resulting constitutional government.<sup>30</sup> Between these two extremes was the position of the Egyptian nationalist leader Mustafa Kamel who was known for his struggle to liberate Egypt from British colonialism.<sup>31</sup> However, he claimed that the only way for development and advancement of nations was that of Western modernity,<sup>32</sup> despite his admiration for the modernizing efforts during the time of Mohamed Ali Pasha, which – in his opinion – proposed an Egyptian vision of modernity.<sup>33</sup>

Sheikh Muhammad Rashid Rida had a more balanced vision of the West. He analyzed the reasons for Western progress and the main pillars

of Western civilization as manifested in the 30 years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, namely the economic dynamism and industrial and technological progress; political democracy that controlled Western governments; and moral and social values such as dedication to work, cooperation, organizational capability, love of knowledge, the spirit of research and innovation, the separation between the mind and emotion, and the Western attitude toward women. But he also saw the other side of the West, that is, the colonial West, which is driven by the values of individualism, power, racism, nationalism and excessive material enjoyment, and thus its behavior is in conflict with its advocated principles. Rida was not a mimic of everything brought from the West, nor was he an absolute rejecter of it; he just called for taking from the West while adhering to Islamic values. He admired the Japanese model of modernization and distinguished it from the Turkish model of Westernization.<sup>34</sup> He believed in the necessity of combining religious and heritage assets of the Muslims on the one hand with Western knowledge and sciences on the other.<sup>35</sup>

The intellectual Abd Al-Rahman Al-Kawakibi was erratic in his vision of the West. On the one hand he criticized the Sultan of Turkey for trying to reform the state on a Western basis<sup>36</sup> and urged Muslims to adhere to their religion and culture and not to follow strangers who invite them while seeking to disrupt their unity. He accused the Ottomans deliberately of turning a blind eye to the massacres committed by the Spanish against the Moors in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries and the occupation by the West of most Muslim countries in order to protect their interests in Eastern Europe.<sup>37</sup> On the other hand he expressed his admiration for Western democracy and its model of the welfare state<sup>38</sup> and called for the reconstruction of the Islamic caliphate on a federal basis similar to what was in effect at the time in the United States and Germany. He also supported the secularism of the West and the separation of religion from the state in Muslim countries as a permanent solution to the problem of the Caliphate in the modern era.<sup>39</sup> The Caliph's responsibilities – in his opinion – must be limited to matters of religion and not to interfere in the political affairs of Muslim countries. This concept of the

role of the Caliph is very similar to the role of the Pope in the Roman Catholic world in general and the Holy Roman Empire in particular. In conclusion, the perception by most Muslim League thinkers of the West was neither purely positive nor negative, but mixed. However, it is noticed that they unanimously agreed that the liberation of Muslims from colonialism was a primary goal and that the establishment of the Muslim League was a means to achieve this goal as well as being an ideal in itself for some of them.

*The Third Stage: The West Prevents  
the Restoration of the Caliphate After its Abolition in 1924*

The West played a crucial role in the overthrow of the Ottoman Empire, which became dependent on Germany during World War I,<sup>40</sup> subsequently suffering a military defeat and was separated from its Arab territories after a revolution supported by Britain and France. British, French and Greek forces occupied its capital Istanbul and parts of its territories in Anatolia. There after the Turkish National Movement emerged led by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk to liberate the occupied Turkish territories.<sup>41</sup> The Movement succeeded and took over rule of the country, separating the position of the Sultan from that of the Caliph and abolishing the sultanate and establishing the Turkish Republic in October 1923; five months later the post of the Caliph was also abolished. Although these decisions were the result of internal developments in the nascent Republic in order to resolve the conflict between the Sultan, his supporters and scholars on one side and the leaders of the National Movement, their supporters and the Westernized elite on the other side,<sup>42</sup> it affected the whole Islamic world. Muslims were without a caliph for the first time since the fall of Baghdad at the hands of the Mongols six and a half centuries earlier. Therefore, many great Muslim figures, their communities and their institutions rejected such decisions, considering that the Muslim Caliphate is not a Turkish business and called for the revival of the caliphate.

This revival did not come about even though some Islamic parties still uphold the call today, such as the Islamic Liberation Party. The West has been accused of working to thwart such a call and to prevent the revival of the Islamic Caliphate. In addition to the occupation of Muslim countries, which virtually prevented them from establishing an overarching framework that would connect them all, the Western colonial powers, especially Britain, were accused of intervening in the debate among Muslims – scholars and rulers – about the restoration of the caliphate and trying to dissuade them from proceeding along this path. The evidence for this is their position on the debate concerning Sheikh Ali Abdel Razek's book, *Islam and the Principles of Government*, in which he denied any basis for the caliphate in the Quran and the Sunnah.<sup>43</sup> Although the book is not a sober academic study according to the clerics of the Al-Azhar Mosque, it caused a broad intellectual and political debate because of the position of the author and the sensitivities of the time and place of its publication. First, Sheikh Ali Abdel Razek was a judge in a court of law and bore the title of “scholar” in the Al-Azhar Mosque—the prestigious educational institution that had long been considered the highest intellectual authority in Egypt and the Sunni Muslim world. It was not expected that a sheikh who belongs to this institution to deviate from the basic principles of Islamic political thought or to abuse the two basic sources of Islamic legislation—the Quran and Sunnah; two charges he was convicted of when judging his only published book.

Secondly, although the writer had completed his book long before its publication – as noted later – he preferred to publish in the Spring of 1925 when only few Muslims had awoken from the shock of the abolition of the caliphate by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk a year ago. Regardless of the extent of weakness and corruption in the Ottoman Empire at the end of its administration it had remained a symbol of the unity of the Islamic World. At the time of the publication of the book, Muslim scholars and their representatives were holding conferences to consider how to restore the caliphate and not to consider if it needed restoring, since its restoration was taken for granted by them. The book not only downgraded the history of the Islamic Caliphate but also ridiculed the ideas of Muslims on how to

restore it and create a common future, basing his argument on the claim that the caliphate had no origins in valid Islamic sources. The shock by many Muslims at the book was no less than their shock at the decision to abolish the Ottoman Caliphate.

Third, while secular Turkey was the best place to publish that book, Egypt was not a suitable environment to disseminate such ideas in that period. Egypt was the country most nominated for the revival of the Caliphate – even formally – and its king was preparing for that high office. Egypt was also a refuge for many Turkish scholars who had fled from the persecution of the new secular system, including Sheikh al-Islam Mustafa Sabri, who published in Egypt a book that exposed Atatürk’s violations of Islamic law. Perhaps more importantly, it was not possible for Al-Azhar to disregard Sheikh Ali Abdel Razek’s attack against the basics of the Islamic political system, since he belonged to that prestigious scholarly institution. Thus, according to established rules in Al-Azhar, the Committee of Senior Scholars convened to examine the book and found it poor academically and therefore judged that the author should no longer carry the title of “Scholar” and was forced to give up his position as a Sharia judge and was no longer qualified for any government position. It should be noted that the Committee did not issue a verdict regarding the validity or non-validity of the Sheikh’s beliefs; its task was purely professional despite the political consequences of its resolution. In defense of the fundamentals that the Sheikh had violated, a number of Al-Azhar scholars – especially those who were directly involved in that issue – criticized the book and refuted the allegations and suspicions raised by it.<sup>44</sup>

Although the British High Commissioner in Egypt took neither a favorable nor unfavorable position in the controversy raised by Sheikh Ali Abdel Razek’s book – since he was very careful not to interfere in this sensitive religious issue – the book was in line with British policy in the Middle East. Although it was published in 1925, Sheikh Ali Abdel Razek had completed writing it long before, namely, before the end of World War I; this is clear from the frequent references to the Ottoman state as a contemporary entity and Sultan Mohammad Rashad as Caliph of Muslims. This implies that Sheikh Ali Abdel Razek was not challenging

the British occupiers and the king of Egypt who was loyal to them. If the claim of non-authenticity of the Caliphate according to Islamic law as stated in the book had any political purpose, it was definitely in line with the goal of Britain, i.e. the disintegration and colonization of Islamic countries.<sup>45</sup>

However, accusations that the West attempted to impede the restoration of the Caliphate can be answered by the observation that Arab politicians who were most eager to revive the Caliphate were the most friendly of, or subservient to, the West. Sharif Hussein of the Hijaz and the government of the parliamentary minority in Egypt were two examples. Some Arabs believed that Sharif Hussein was more qualified to be a Caliph and after Turkey's decision to abolish the Caliphate they held a conference in Jordan for his inauguration as Caliph of Muslims. The results of the conference were acknowledged by Iraq, Syria and Jordan. Although Sharif Hussein stressed that his post as Caliph was just symbolic and non-political, all other Muslim countries refused to recognize the results of the conference.<sup>46</sup> During the following pilgrimage season Sharif Hussein tried to use his rule of Mecca and Medina to persuade pilgrims of his right to the position of Caliph, but the exiled Tunisian scholar, Sheikh Abdul Aziz Thaalbi, rebutted this claim. Sharif Hussein declared that the conference would be held in Mecca during the following pilgrimage season to resolve the Caliphate issue.<sup>47</sup> However, by then Sharif Hussein had left the Hijaz after it had been taken over by the Saudis and therefore the conference did not take place. King Abdul Aziz Ibn Saud did not claim his eligibility for the post of Caliph but he was quoted as saying that no contemporary rulers deserved to be Caliph.<sup>48</sup> He only called a conference in Mecca in 1926 to show that Muslims had accepted the rule of the Saudi family in Hijaz because Egypt did not recognize the Saudi expansion. The conference did not discuss the issue of the Caliphate.<sup>49</sup>

The second attempt to restore the Caliphate was by Al-Azhar Al-Sharif with support from the minority government that was loyal to the king and the British in Egypt. Al-Azhar called a conference in Cairo for intellectuals representing all Muslim countries to choose a new Caliph. It was decided to hold the conference on the first anniversary of the decision

to abolish the Caliphate but political difficulties in Egypt prevented the convention at that time. These difficulties were not far from the theme of the conference, i.e. revival of the Caliphate. On the one hand certain Egyptian political parties – including the Wafd Party, with a parliamentary majority – were against the conference for fear of the inauguration of King Fouad as Caliph of the Muslims, which could impede constitutional reforms in the country. On the other hand a government crisis took place as a result of the publication of the aforementioned book. Despite the rejection of the publication by Al-Azhar and public opinion it was defended by one party in the government coalition – the Liberal Constitutionalists Party – due to the link between the author and the leaders of the party. King Fouad took advantage of this to get rid of this party after he had rid himself of the Wafd party government, which had a parliamentary majority. Because of this crisis the conference was postponed for a year and its agenda was changed to be limited to discussions of the legitimacy of the Caliphate and whether it was only to be symbolic or symbolic and political. However, most of the guests at the conference did not respond to the call to declare King Fouad as Caliph of Muslims. They objected because Egypt was effectively under the influence of the British and did not apply Islamic law in many matters.<sup>50</sup> Also King Abdul Aziz ibn Saud declined to send a delegation to the conference because the organizers had invited some of the Hijaz senators who were dissenters from his authority. Therefore, the conference convened with those scholars who were present or already a resident in Egypt and therefore did not represent the Muslim world.<sup>51</sup>

It is clear that the failure to restore the Caliphate was due mainly to differences between Muslim rulers and that the role of the West in this failure was limited, weak and indirect. These differences saved the West the trouble of opposing the restoration of the Caliphate. This view is consistent with that of Sheikh Mohammed Rashid Rida in his epistle about the Islamic Caliphate, which he published following the decision of the Turkish National Assembly to separate the Islamic Caliphate from the Turkish government and to withdraw all political powers and authorities from the Ottoman Caliph. Rida found that the two obstacles hindering the

restoration of the Islamic Caliphate were hatred between Arabs and Turks on the one hand and the growing alienation of the Muslim World on the other. Having no hope that the national Turkish government led by Atatürk would support his proposal to revive the caliphate, or that the conflicting or West-oriented Arab leaders would put that proposal into effect, Rida called for an innovative proposal for the establishment of a righteous Islamic caliphate. He proposed that the establishment of the Caliphate should be between Arab and Turkish lands and selected for this purpose the city of Mosul in northern Iraq. Other Islamic countries would join the Caliphate in turn if their leaders were convinced of its importance and the effectiveness of its political system.<sup>52</sup>

His vision of the West's position on the Caliphate model he had proposed was optimistic. He thought that the West would be little concerned or try to prevent its establishment and he called on the West not to fear its establishment because it would not turn into an Islamic league that would mobilize Muslims against the West.<sup>53</sup> For Rida, the structure of the Caliphate was to be very much akin to that of Western democratic systems.<sup>54</sup> Rida did not fear the West but was afraid of the control of Westernized political parties in the Muslim world, especially the nationalist parties in Turkey.<sup>55</sup> Rida's intuition proved to be correct, for these parties were the most opposed to the re-establishment of the Caliphate in whatever form, to the extent that the Turkish National Assembly in 1924 decided to abolish the Islamic Caliphate altogether.

The fact was that the issue of the Caliphate needed a new and balanced approach to the West which only a handful of thinkers at that time – such as Sheikh Muhammad Rashid Rida and Dr. Abdul Razzaq Al-Sanhooori, who saw the West in both its positive and negative aspects – dared to adopt. Dr. Sanhooori studied in France and obtained his Ph.D in law with a dissertation addressing the issue of the Caliphate in modern times and called for Muslims to benefit from the Western experience and establish of a league of eastern nations as an alternative to the Caliphate under unfavorable international conditions.<sup>56</sup> He found that Western colonial powers refused any attempt to revive the Caliphate in its traditional form, so he supported the establishment of the league of eastern

nations as an incomplete Caliphate.<sup>57</sup> In his opinion, this was a temporary solution to the Caliphate issue in modern times pending the establishment of the Caliphate proper in accordance with the Prophet's model.<sup>58</sup>

*The Fourth Stage: The West hinders  
the Unity of Islamic Countries and Political  
Rapprochement after Independence*

After Muslim countries gained their independence several attempts at rapprochement were made between them. However, this convergence was governed by several factors, most notably the sensitivity over the issue of sovereignty; definition of national identity; preoccupation with domestic restructuring within these countries; and foreign relations with major powers, especially the West. Of concern here is this last factor, since its effects were both positive and negative.

During World War II the British Foreign Minister, Anthony Eden, stated that his government was convinced of the natural right of the Arab peoples to strengthen ties between them. The sympathy of his government was with any action undertaken by the Arabs to strengthen their economic, cultural and political unity provided that the initiative comes from the Arabs themselves. Several Arab governments had actually made plans to achieve Arab unity which resulted in their agreement on the Protocol of Alexandria in October 1944 followed by the signing of the Charter of the League of Arab States in March 1945.<sup>59</sup> The establishment of the Arab League was a move forward toward unity although it was limited in two important ways. First, although all members of the Arab League were Islamic countries that later joined the Organization of Islamic Conference, the membership of the league was limited to Arab countries minus all other Islamic states, thus it was not an Islamic league as advocated by Sheikh Jamaluddin Al-Afghani, for example. Second, the League charter defined its goals as the strengthening of relations between its members, coordination between their policies and the achievement of close cooperation between them without establishing any union.

Despite Britain's support for the idea of the League, its attitude towards it after its creation was so uncertain that the Council of the Arab League recommended to the governments of Arab states at its fourth extraordinary session in 1946 that they should demand the British government recognize the Arab League.<sup>60</sup> This was not the only situation that raised the doubts of the Arab League members about Britain; many other Islamic countries generally remained wary of the positions of Britain and other Western colonial powers regarding territorial unity of Islamic countries that had been under colonial rule. Such countries expressed their suspicion – individually or jointly – through the resolutions issued by international organizations such as the Arab League alone, or together with non-Muslim countries such as the Non-Aligned Movement and the Organization of African Unity (OAU). Since its inception in 1945 and for several decades afterwards the Arab League issued decisions through its council that condemned the attitudes of certain Western colonial powers towards the territorial unity of Arab countries under their occupation. The Arab League Council tried to respond to the general attempts to divide up the Arab Maghreb – and Libya in particular – and especially Britain's attempts to divide Libya with France and Italy and to divide the southern Yemen into protectorates under British occupation. It also supported the unity of the Nile Valley under the Egyptian crown in the face of British attempts to separate Egypt from Sudan, and the Republic of Somalia's demand for its right to the Somali coast (which was then known as the Issa and Afar region, later taking the name of Djibouti) in the face of attempts by France to separate it.<sup>61</sup>

Such condemnation was reflected in the position of the Arab League Council on Mauritania's independence in 1960. The Council endorsed the position of Morocco and confirmed in an extraordinary session held in August 1960 that Mauritania was an integral part of Morocco, that Morocco had the right to exercise full sovereignty on all its parts and that colonialists aimed – through their attempt to create an artificial entity called the “Islamic Republic of Mauritania” – to break up the unity of Morocco. The Council supported Morocco's claim for recovery of Mauritania as an integral part of its territory; condemned the attempts to

separate it from Morocco; and called to work in various ways to thwart such attempts and support Morocco at the United Nations and to try and convince friendly countries to support its efforts to restore this part of its territory. The Council did not accept the membership of Mauritania in the Arab League until 1973, i.e. after Morocco had recognized its independence.<sup>62</sup>

It was not only the attitude of Western colonial powers to the territorial unity of Muslim countries that muddled the relations between the West and the Muslim World after the independence of Islamic countries. Indeed, some leaders of Muslim nations felt that the major Western powers prevented their allies among Muslim countries from rapprochement with other Islamic states except when it served the objectives of those powers. A prominent example of this is the refusal by certain leaders to align with foreign policy approaches of major Western powers and their allies among Islamic countries in the face of the Soviet Union and its Communist bloc. Such foreign policy encouraged Islamic countries surrounding, or adjacent to, the Soviet Union to establish an alliance in order to prevent any expected or delusional Soviet aggression. The fruit of this was the Baghdad Pact, which was joined in the mid-1950s by the governments of Iraq, Iran, Turkey and Pakistan, in addition to the United Kingdom and the United States. However, this organization was met with strong opposition from the governments of Muslim countries other than those with pro-Western leanings. For example, the Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser launched a strong and successful diplomatic and media campaign to prevent the expansion of the Baghdad Pact in the Arab world.<sup>63</sup> This alliance did not succeed in adding other Muslim countries to its membership, let alone bringing together Muslim around one goal, i.e. Islamic unity on the alliance with the West. Although the Baghdad Pact lost its momentum due to Iraq's withdrawal after the 1958 Revolution and then finally disintegrated after the withdrawal of Iran after its 1979 Revolution, and despite the attempts by Pakistan and Iran separately to bring Muslim countries into one regulatory framework,<sup>64</sup> the goal of Islamic unity remained far away.

If the reaction of Muslim countries is justified regarding the attitude of Western colonial powers over Islamic territorial unity, then the reaction of some of these countries to the attempts of major Western powers to prevent rapprochement between Islamic countries was not justified in all cases. Some Islamic countries had a vested interest in the fight against Communism. Thus, the Muslim World League was founded in Saudi Arabia during the Hajj season in 1962 and made one of its goals the struggle against atheist ideology (such as Communism) in the Islamic World.<sup>65</sup> Even when King Faisal bin Abdul Aziz of Saudi Arabia called for a conference of the Muslim World League, the governments of some Muslim countries – especially those that were described as progressive – remained suspicious for several reasons, mainly the fear that it would become a prelude to a new form of the Baghdad Pact, so much so that the Egyptian President Gamal Abdel-Nasser called it the “Islamic alliance”, accusing those who called for it of serving Western interests.<sup>66</sup> This idea was viewed more positively only after the regional balance of power and positions of certain countries regarding the conference had changed in the wake of Israeli aggression on Arab states in 1967 and the Al-Aqsa Mosque fire two years later. The Islamic Summit Conference was held in Rabat, Morocco, in 1969 and resulted in the establishment of the Organization of the Islamic Conference in 1972, which changed its name in 2011 to the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. But the organization – like the Arab League – limited its objectives to strengthening the relations between its members, the coordination between their policies and the achievement of close cooperation between them without any union between them.

### *Conclusion*

Over the past two centuries, many ordinary Muslims and their political movements have always been suspicious of the position of the West regarding Islamic unity. The West deepened this uncertainty by adopting negative attitudes toward this highly important and sensitive issue. Western countries have sought to exploit the foreign capitulations

obtained by their merchants in the Ottoman Empire not only for huge commercial gain by opening up the Ottoman markets for themselves, but also to dismantle the Ottoman Empire itself, which many Muslims considered the symbol of their unity and strength. Upon dismembering the Ottoman Empire Western powers occupied its territories in succession after having colonized many Muslim countries that were not under the rule of the Ottomans. These actions reflected negatively on the image of the West for many Islamic reformist thinkers at that time. Western countries should review their policies toward the issue of Islamic unity if they are keen to remove the doubts of Muslims about them in order to build a strong foundation for the success of any serious dialogue.

However, Muslim doubts expressed about Western attitudes towards Islamic unity were not always accurate. The West was accused of working to prevent the revival of the Islamic Caliphate after falling under the new Turkish Republic and of trying to frustrate the revival by occupying Muslim countries and dissuading Muslims from pursuing this revival. The failure to restore the Caliphate was due primarily to the differences between Muslim rulers; the role of the West in this failure was limited and indirect. These differences saved the West the effort of having to show strong opposition to the restoration of the Caliphate. Moreover, many Islamic countries after independence remained wary of Western colonial powers' position on territorial unity of occupied Islamic countries. Such wariness was rightfully expressed, individually or jointly, through the resolutions issued by international organizations to which they belonged. However, a number of Islamic leaders also felt that major Western powers prevented Muslim countries from allying with one another except when it served Western objectives in the fight against Communism. This ignores the fact that some Muslim countries saw a vested interest in the fight against Communism and their policies did not merely reflect the position of Western powers on the unity of all or some Islamic countries. Muslims, therefore, must review their own doubts about the positions of the West on the issue of Islamic unity if they are interested in the success of any serious dialogue.

However, dialogue between Muslims and the West may become more useful if it transcends the level of states and governments, which are primarily political in nature. This dialogue can take advantage of the current wave of globalization to enrich the exchange of cultural values and be open to civil society institutions in the Muslim and Western worlds. Muslims have already begun to realize the possibility of dialogue with certain non-state actors in Western countries in order to find common ground. Dialogue between civil society actors is a priority and is very productive whether at the grassroots or official levels and clear goals should be outlined, including long-term and short-term aims. For example, peaceful co-existence may be a long-term goal under which there are interim goals, such as agreement on specific issues and creating mechanisms for cooperation.