

THE FUTURE OF MUSLIM STATES IN THE BACKGROUND OF HISTORY

An Address to the Pakistan Institute of International Affairs

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Central position of Pakistan - relations among Muslim states - emergence of independent Pakistan in its historical perspective - Turkey, Iran, North Africa and Afghanistan - efforts of Jinnah and the support of the Muslims of India - advantages enjoyed by Pakistan - causes of decline of Muslim states in the past - dynamic nature of Islam - the Umayyad period - comparison with the first 100 years of Islam - the late Sayyid Ameer Ali's contribution to Islam - clash between conservative and progressive elements - Pakistan's destiny - neutrality - Muslim unity.

I thank you most sincerely for inviting me today to address this distinguished assembly. I am happy that in Pakistan there exists a body for the study of its relations with other countries and the world generally. My subject this afternoon may not immediately be of such importance in international studies as some others. Nevertheless, what is to be the future of the Muslim states, and what is to be the example that we must set for them is as important from the international point of view as anything else. For Pakistan holds in one way or another a very central position in the world, from the Pacific to the Atlantic, from the Philippines to Morocco. You will find, from Indonesia right up to Zanzibar, vast Muslim populations. The inter-relation of these must be ultimately intellectual and cultural and spiritual, rather than political and legal. But all the more important is the fact that these relations should be on those lines and not binding.

The importance of the position of Pakistan as an independent Muslim state cannot be fully understood nor the fundamental

issues before her in the future, unless certain historical facts are realised and their consequences courageously faced. Incredible as it may seem, there has not been before Pakistan a really independent Muslim state since 1750, i.e., the last 200 years. No doubt, the Moghul Empire nominally existed and its autonomous *subas* that had become, in fact, states, had a certain form of national independence. But one and all were in a precarious position *vis-à-vis* the expanding colonial forces of Europe, as represented by England and France. Nor had the Muslim states such prestige and popularity amongst their subjects as to give them that self-assurance and self-reliance, without which outside dangers cannot be faced.

Turkey then had a vast and potentially powerful empire, which had gradually become so weak in relation to Russia, Austria, England and France, that already at that period, and much more so as time went on, her very existence depended on the mutual jealousies of Christendom. In the 19th century, she was known as the Sick Man of Europe and Asia. Province after province, including Muslim Egypt, was lost. Her Government's policy both external and internal, was one long struggle against total collapse and to save what she could from day to day.

Iran, after Nadir Shah, had been so weakened by internal divisions and intellectual decay and other disorders, that it had also fallen, like Turkey, to dependence on European jealousy for her survival.

The same was true of Morocco and North Africa generally. The vast African and Asiatic dominions of Sultans of Muscat were just British protectorates. Though since the time of Ahmad Shah Abdali, an Afghan national state existed, it, too, owed its independence ultimately to the policies of her neighbours, rather than to her own strength. None of these Muslim states had a national population sufficiently important to stand up against European encroachment. On paper Turkey, indeed, did possess a powerful empire. But its internal, racial and religious divisions and subdivisions rendered her a comparatively easy prey to the ambitions of her avowed and secret enemies. I think this is a fair picture of the world of Islam from the middle of the 18th century till our own times. But there are natural forces greater than the wisdom of the West. Pride and folly are often fellow travellers. The enmity of England and Germany brought about in the 20th century a new world, in which the birth of a truly independent Muslim state, with all the advantages that can give a nation trust in her own destiny, was made possible by the efforts of the Quaid-

i-Azam and the support of the Muslim population of India. That mighty infant is the Pakistan of today.

As a member of the Commonwealth, which, I for one, hope in her own interests, she will remain, she belongs to a confederation that is not limited to what was once known as the British Empire, but includes inevitably that most powerful nation in the world, the United States of America, and behind her, sooner or later, the rest of the new world. The days of foreign intervention and interference are gone. Her numbers, her resources, her geographical position, the fundamental unity of her population in sentimental aspirations, give Pakistan all the advantages which the Muslim world lost some 200 years ago. The prospect is indeed attractive and we should have every confidence in the future. But destiny, as presented in history, must be understood and its dangers avoided. There were other Muslim independent states in the past, with even far greater might than Pakistan can ever have and they gradually degenerated to utter helplessness in the 19th century. What was the cause?

Our critics of the West and the East alike maintain that Islamic society carried within it, by its static character, the germs of decay and death. According to them, the disease is congenital and not acquired. Easy optimism, and just ostrich-like disregarding the lesson of the past is to play into the hands of our enemies, secret and open.

The soul of our nation is ultimately more important than its other resources. I have long pondered over the causes of the downfall of Muslim empires and I am convinced that the disease was acquired and was not congenital. Just as in the life of the individual, the difference between youth, health and vigour, and old age and illness is ultimately adaptability to the changes brought about by environment, so no society that allows its spirit to be limited by conventions and customs can have that dynamic quality without which the society, and later the state, will decay.

Believe me, Islam was and is dynamic and not static. It was dynamic, simple and clear during the glorious Omayyad period, when the foundations of Islam were laid wide and deep, so wide and deep that in spite of all its relative weaknesses, it survived the terrible Mongolian invasions and the far more terrible enmity of Europe in later centuries. Ask your historians, ask your calm thinkers to concentrate on that glorious 100 years of Omayyad rule and take that for example, with its simple faith and open mind, with its dynamic qualities without scholasticism and its legal servitudes.

Muslim histories were mostly written by our enemies under the Abbasides and yet with all their bitter prejudices, they cannot help glorifying, not in words but by facts, that period of simple faith and activity. Some of the very greatest saints of Islam, like the Khalifa Umar Ibne Abdul Aziz, the great Hasan Basri, the Spanish ruler Hisham bin Abdur Rahman, were the children of that period. Unfortunately, it ended and with it the certainty of the Islamisation of Europe and with it of the world.

While Damascus looked to the open world through the Mediterranean and the Atlantic, Baghdad was land bound. History's lesson, the supremacy of water over land, was lost to the Muslim world. It is now a well known fact that the small isolated Muslims of Spain did actually sail to the new world and the Cape of Good Hope, but when they returned home, the then weak and isolated Muslim Spain, without help from Asia and North Africa, had not the resources behind it to complete the work of the sailors as Christian Spain and Portugal did a century later.

With the fall of Damascus, Baghdad became the centre of Islam. The very people and the very system whose Mobeds and Dasturs, by narrowness and verbal and legal quibbles, had weakened and destroyed, first the faith of Zoroaster, and then the empire of Iran, took the helm of Islam and played the same disastrous part over again.

Two simple examples may be quoted. The free, social and intellectual part played in the life of Arabia during the first century by Imam Husain's daughter, Sakina, and by the daughter of Talha, and the great grand daughters of Khalifa Abu Bekr, can be contrasted with the position of women in the 19th century. Again, we know what high standard of music and art had been attained in Mecca and Medina as early as the Khilafat by the early Omayyads and compare it with the disdain with which art is looked upon by some misguided Muslims today.

When the mind and spirit of the people are bound down and limited by subtleties and reservations, by turning every custom into law, as was done by the Mobeds and Dasturs in Magian Persia, downfall was only a question of time. The Muslim world was so handicapped in Baghdad that, in spite of its advance in science and philosophy, from its very nature, it could not go forward, as Europe did two or three centuries later, from the same science and philosophy which it first acquired from the Muslims.

You have many problems in this country, economic, military, scientific. I am sure with God's blessings, you will overcome your

period of difficulty, but be careful of the soul and the spirit of the people. Do not look to the third century of Islamic history, but to the first.

The late Syed Ameer Ali rendered many great services to Islam. His book: *The Spirit of Islam*, is a great monument. But, as I often told him, his greatest service was a small concise explanation of Islam, which he published and which has now been forgotten. I wish the people of Pakistan could find it again and make its study compulsory for religious training in all Muslim schools, whatever the sect or sub-sect. Take care of all your resources, but the greatest of all resources is the mind and spirit of man.

And finally, the fact must be faced that there is either an open or a hidden clash between the conservative and the progressive elements in Muslim countries. In Turkey this clash has led to a secular state. In Egypt, it is there between the Ikhwan and the governing classes. It threatens itself in the opposition between the so-called Dar-ul-Islam and the responsible Government of Indonesia. These dangers are very grave for the future of the Muslim state. Thank God it is not so in Pakistan, but unless a healthy middle way, such as existed in the first century is found, the ship may be on the rocks again. The pious Muslim thinkers who face realities in Egypt, in North Africa and Iran know all about it. I hope and pray that it may be the destiny of Pakistan, where there is no clash, whose creator, the Quaid-i-Azam, was essentially a modern man, to bring about this spiritual and intellectual unity throughout the other Muslim states. Here and now, and by not only its example, but by its influence and mediation and courtesy, prevent it ever again from leading to final break, as it did in Turkey, in any other Muslim state and society. It is not influenced by such an effort on the part of Pakistan. The consequences may be a form of secularism in conflict with the thought and spirit of the people. With this prayer I wish you every success in the material, intellectual and spiritual world.

Summary of Discussion

Question: The distinguished speaker has said that Muslim peoples should be clear about certain contingent dangers. I should like to know the learned speaker's opinion with respect to the attitude that they should adopt about dollar diplomacy on the one hand and communism on the other; whether they should remain neutral or take sides with the one or the other party. In case the

reply is that they should remain neutral, whether neutrality is feasible under the existing circumstances.

His Royal Highness The Prince Aga Khan: My answer is that neutrality is obviously to everybody's interest. No country has ever prospered by going to war. But the problem today is whether such an attitude is possible or impossible. You see the world is shrinking. Tibet, Sinkiang and the heart of China may be within twelve hours of New York or London. Before the atomic or hydrogen bomb comes, the world will have reached probably that stage through jet planes. The question is: Is it possible to be neutral? I doubt it. But what should be our policy then? It is impossible in politics to look too far ahead. You cannot say now what you should do then. You must have certain principles. When the time comes, I hope our statesmen will act according to their principles. Look, what has happened in the short space of time. At the time of the Round Table Conferences, even the Quaid-i-Azam did not ask for Pakistan. We would have been satisfied with much less. I have been through the fight myself. I know what we asked for and see what we have got. See what we were and what we are today. When the time comes, our leaders will decide what is their interest then. One great quality of Bismark [*sic*] was that he never made up his mind for anything for more than three months ahead.

Question: Do you think the idea of Islamistan would materialize?

His Royal Highness The Prince Aga Khan: What do you mean by Islamistan? Do you mean by it intellectual, religious and cultural unity or political unity? If you mean political unity, how can that be? All the Muslim countries want their independence. Some day, perhaps, there might be a sort of federal arrangements [*sic*]. But that is far away in the future. Now we have a national state and the spirit, which is more important than material strength. I am sure our statesmen of the time will choose the right policy.

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