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STRATEGIC AWARENESS IN BUILDING UNITY

and Strengthening Relations between the Ummah's Components

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

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PREFACE

'Unity' has for long decades been one of the key issues at the center of interest of intellectual and cultural elites and political and religious leaders in the Islamic world, particularly between the last third of the 19ᵗʰ century and the second half of the sixties of the 20ᵗʰ century. This interest gave rise to many divergences in opinion and in the positions taken, as well as to conflicting views on the orientation to follow if the efforts undertaken are to bring about this unity of ranks among Arabs and Muslims, enfolding them all in one and the same civilizational crucible. Conceptions of unity varied so widely as to generate a great deal of conflict and disputes that hindered progress from the narrow spheres of theory to the broad horizons of implementation. Such was the case that many of the political setbacks, military defeats, and missed opportunities of civilizational edification, economic development and social prosperity were the result of a unity built on precarious foundations in many Arab and Islamic countries. The issue of unity became synonymous with virulent controversy instead of being the vehicle of understanding, consensus and concord.

I addressed this issue in its multiple dimensions, diverse origins and various ramifications in this study titled "**Strategic awareness in building unity and strengthening relations between the Ummah's components**", with which I participated in the international conference held by the Global Forum for Moderation (Amman, Jordan, 11-12 March 2017) on "**Muslims and the world: from the impasse to the way out**". In this presentation, I spoke at length about the development that surrounded this critical issue as it sought to keep pace with the changes experienced by the Arab and Islamic world through the successive phases that led to the current

stage. I explained the connotations of unity and the subjective and objective factors that led to the disunion of Arab and Muslim peoples and the disintegration of the greater Islamic edifice. I addressed the unification endeavors undertaken from different angles at the Arab and Islamic levels, and concluded by emphasizing that building unity and fostering relations between the Ummah's components, found its way to actual implementation in the early seventies of the past century, taking form in a regional formation established on the basis of the United Nations Charter, namely the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. This organization was created around the principle of an Islamic solidarity that brings all Muslim peoples together regardless of the diversity of their ethnicities, tongues, political regimes and sovereignty systems. From this conclusion, and in light ofthe many failed attempts at unity, I pointed out how the true Islamic unity that withstands the vagaries of time and holds strong in the face of the tough challenges facing the Islamic Ummah, is embodied today by this 57-member strong Organization, as well as by the organizations that operate under its aegis, particularly the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO) and the Islamic Development Bank.

The general conclusion I came to in this study is that no Islamic state can in today's world enfold all the peoples of the Islamic world, as was the case in the past. It is thus necessary to work towards strengthening this Organization which federates the states of the Islamic world, providing it with the material and human resources necessary for its success and creating the necessary conditions for it to succeed in its civilizational mission. It is equally important to respect the decisions flowing from its various conferences and to implement them in a spirit of solidarity and symbiosis that gives

precedence to the greater good and to key causes over marginal issues. Thus, this strategic awareness becomes a strategic project that edifies unity, strengthens relationships between the components of the Ummah and frees it from the civilizational impasse that hampers its march and provokes the covetousness of some powers.

I hope that this study, published today with its Arabic (original) and French versions, will be a useful addition to the contemporary Islamic political thought that leans towards realism, favors methodical analysis, historical documentation and legal anchoring to reach the truths that must be withheld, relied on and referred to when tackling today's issues and facing the challenges besieging the Islamic Ummah in its cohesion and solidarity, and the deterrent force that protects the rights of Muslim peoples, safeguards their supreme interests and contributes to edifying global peace.

May Allah guide our steps onto the right path.

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Unity: an immutable fact

The monotheism-upholding Ummah can only be a nation of unity in its lofty meanings, profound and diverse connotations and myriad nuances. The Islamic Ummah is one nation even when it is assailed by troubles and disasters, ravaged by political upheavals that weaken the greater Islamic edifice and wreak havoc with the Muslims' might, tearing their bonds apart and weakening their historical roles. Allah (SWT) says: [**And verily this Brotherhood of yours is a single Brotherhood**] (*Al-Muminum*, verse 52), and the same verse occurs again in the chapter of *Al-Anbiaa* (92).

Sheikh Mohamed Abu Zahra believes that Islamic unity is an immutable truth by virtue of Quranic texts and hadiths. Islam admits no discrimination based on color, race, language or culture. This unity took shape during the Prophet's era (peace be upon him), and that of the Rightly-guided Caliphs and subsequent Umayyad and Abbasid reigns, although regionalist or clannish loyalties which had begun to rear their head during the Umayyad era had started to permeate Islamic groups. This clannish loyalty was indeed behind the Arab *Assabyya* (spirit of Arab kinship), and both were pre-Islamic in their sense, negating the essence of Islam and the commandments of Prophet Mohamed.[1]

From the second half of the 19th century when Islamic states began to collapse one after another under the onslaught of Western colonialism, the outlines of a great conspiracy were emerging, paving the way for the collapse of the Ottoman Empire during World War I. Despite its many flaws, this empire represented a

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(1) Sheikh Mohamed Abu Zahra: *Islamic Unity*, p. 9. Dar Al-Fikr Al-'Arabi, Cairo, 2nd edition, 1977.

homogenous union of Muslim peoples in the Balkans, the Arab region and Central Asia, despite disparities in the standards of that unity from one region to another. Islamic thought focused on strengthening ranks, reinforcing ties, fending off threats, overcoming problems, and countering the effects of the Western interventions fuelled by crusading movements, colonial ambitions and the Zionist machinations which were at their budding stages and only starting to emerge on the global political scene. The notion of an 'Islamic unity' emerged in its optimal form as the **Islamic League** in the political sense known in those early days of the reign of Sultan Abdul Hamid II (1876-1909). This sultan paid a dear price for the policy he followed and which was highly disapproved of by European countries, especially England, France, Tsarist Russia and the Vatican.

Evolution of the term 'Islamic League':

The term 'Islamic League' first appeared in the second half of the 19th century and expanded later to include several other concepts. A number of reformists saw in it an invitation to reinstate religion to its former status as during the ancestors' time, while others interpreted it as a call to modernize and develop Islamic concepts, and interpret them in ways that match the evolution of modern life and keeps pace with the concepts produced by the urbanized West and its culture. Others yet saw in it an invitation to revive the Arab Quraishi caliphate but without this caliphate holding a religious authority, becoming instead a mere religious symbol of the unity of Muslims.[2]

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(2) Ahmed Fahd Barakat Al-Shawabkeh: *Islamic League Movement*, pp. 5-6. Maktabat Al-Manar, Az-Zarkaa, 1984.

Sultan Abdul Hamid II believed that Islamic unity was a means and a cure for the full expanse of the Ottoman Empire and was thus reluctant to give Jews any concessions in Islamic territories. He championed the notion of an Islamic league that rested on two concepts. The first was reforming the Muslims' conditions and introducing them to modern civilization within the framework of an Islamic caliphate, and the second one was to free the Muslim Orient from the clutches of Western colonial domination.[3]

The Islamic league was the reform movement through which its advocates wished to unite all Muslims within the same union that could be either Arab or Ottoman, i.e. the unification of all peoples who uphold Islam as their religion within a league or a federation motivated by religious following.[4]

Containment of the Islamic world and abortion of unity:

One of the outcomes of the Zionist and Crusading intrigues that encircled the Ottoman Sultan Abdul Hamid II was the ruining of his reputation, the defamation of his character, the falsification of his history and the conspiracies weaved against him, ultimately resulting in his going down in modern history as the sultan tyrant or the Red

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(3) Sayyar Jmeil: *Arabs and Turks: Awakening and Modernity from Otto-manization to Secularization*. Centre for Arab Unity Studies, Beirut, 1997.

(4) Mona Ahmed Abu Zeid in her preface of the book *Khaterat Jamal Eddine Al-Afghani Al-Husseini*, p. 52, written by Mohamed Basha Al-Makhzoumi. Dar Al-Kitab Al-Masri, Cairo, Dar Al-Kitab Al-Lubnani, Beirut, Bibliotheca Alexandrina, 2012.

Sultan. His dominion, which stretched over vast expanses across three continents (Europe, Asia and Africa), became known as the Ailing Man. This prompted Western countries, which had appointed themselves as the physicians entrusted with the wellbeing of this ailing man, to expedite his demise instead, liquidating his assets and dismembering them, giving birth to the new national Turkish entity, which was confined within the narrow constraints in Asia Minor, cut off from its roots. A new era had begun with the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire, not only in the Islamic world, but in a general and global way.

While objective researchers acknowledge that the Ottoman Empire served as a protective and unifying umbrella for more than forty different peoples from the Islamic world for over six centuries, they also recognize, out of fairness and in recognition of the facts of history, that that superpower was not the best model of the Islamic approach and rational management of the affairs of Muslims, nor the best way to confront enemies who were growing in numbers and pouncing from east and west, while remaining faithful to the principles of equity and equality in the treatment of the wide spectrum of peoples, races, creeds and denominations that evolved under the banner of this empire.[5]

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(5) Article 18 of the Ottoman Constitution (*Al-Mashruteyya*, 1876) stipulated that all Ottomans were equal before the law, as well as equal in governing rights and obligations, except in religious and doctrinal matters.

Jamal Eddine Al-Afghani, champion of unity:

First published in Paris in 1884 by Jamal Eddine Al-Afghani, the magazine 'Al-Urwa Al-Wuthqa' introduced and strongly championed the notion of an Islamic league. Sheikh Mohamed Rachid Rida says in this regard: 'This magazine was the mouthpiece of a secret society by the same name founded by Jamal Eddine from various elements amongst Muslims from Egypt, India, North Africa and Syria. The goal of this society was to bring about an Islamic unity, awaken Muslims from their deep slumber and alert them to the dangers besieging them, and then accompany them as they set out to banish those dangers.'[6]

Jamal Eddine Al-Afghani expressed his strong belief in the idea of Islamic unity in these words: 'If the Ottoman Empire was able to protect the provinces under its rule from Western hegemony, this would prompt other states to solicit the protection of the Sultan and thus join this Islamic alliance and fend off the West's onslaught on Islamic countries, rise as one man and shed the shackles of the colonizer, so that the Orient can once again belong to the people of the East.'[7]

Be it as it may, the concept of **Islamic unity** in its modern sense was embodied in the Ottoman Empire in a clearly defined way. Conscious of this, one of the main objectives of European colonization was to

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[6] Mohamed Rachid Rida: *Al-Manar* magazine, vol. 3, p. 455. 13 issues of "*Al-'Urwa Al-Wuthqa*" were published, the first one on 13 March 1884, and the second one in October 1884.
[7] Mohamed Bacha Al-Makhzoumi: ***Khaterat Jamal Eddine Al-Afghani Al-Husseini***, p. 72.

break the bonds of that unity from its roots and tear up its fabric, and this was ultimately fulfilled once it toppled the caliphate and sowed the seeds of doubt and mistrust, fuelling enmity and hatred among the members that made up that State, especially between Arabs and Turks. They kindled nationalist tendencies such as Touranian, Arab, Armenian, Arnaut … till waves of hatred towards the Turks rippled through the Arab world. From the other side, estrangement from Arabs prevailed to such extents that it became a de facto policy of the Turkish state which came into existence by virtue of the Treaty of Sevres (France, 1920)[8]. This treaty was concluded between the Western powers that were victorious in World War I, and the new leadership in Turkey which paved the way for them to overthrow the Sultan's rule in 1923, and from there for pouncing on the Ottoman Empire and toppling it (1924).

The most eloquent description of the singular situation that prevailed during those troubled times was made by Chakib Arslane who wrote: 'The only league that brought together Turks, Arabs,

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(8) The allies forced the pro-Sultan government of Istanbul (other than Ankara's government) to ratify the Treaty of Sevres on 10 August 1920, dividing Turkey into three states. The first one was Armenian and included Kars, Ardahan and Erzurum. The second was Kurdish and covered all regions located east of the Euphrates and south of the Armenian state, while Cilice and the entire southern province were handed over to the French. Italy was given all regions located southwest of Anatolia; and Greece was given the city of Izmir and its surrounding regions as well as Adana and Gallipolis. The capital Istanbul and the coast of Marmara were declared a demilitarized zone. The Bosporus and Dardanelles straights were placed under international control to decide of their fate in times of war and peace. (Mostapha Zein: *The Wolf of Anatolia: Mustapha Kamal*, p. 153, Ryad Al-Rayyess lil Kitab wa Al-Nashr, London).

Kurds, Arnauts and Circassians was the religious one. Without this bond, the sultanate would have crumbled centuries earlier, but bad governance on the inside on the one hand, and the machinations of foreigners from the outside, on the other, pushed many Arabs and Arnauts in particular to seek secession from the State despite this religious bond. The Arnaut preceded the Arabs in this and the Sultan set out to discipline the rebels, mobilizing large armies for this purpose. Violent battles ensued, only exacerbating the revolt of the Arnauts. The Arabs, on the other hand, nurtured a certain jealousy towards the Turks because they were more numerous than them yet did not enjoy the same privileges as the Turks. The latter claimed that the Arabs were failing in their duties towards the Sultanate to aspire to equality with the Turks. The British managed, before World War I, to lure many young Arabs, attracting some with material benefits while others joined out of conviction having been persuaded that the British wished to recreate an Arab state such as the Abbasid or the Umayyad and would help the Arabs regain their bygone glories.[9]

Against the backdrop of this colonial towards Islamic unity, seeking to tear apart the Islamic Ummah and create a favorable political climate for the implementation of the Jewish-Zionist political designs, the government of Ankara, which had been moving against the desires of the Ottomans and had triumphed in the liberation war, signed

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(9) Chakib Arsalane: *History of the Ottoman State*, pp. 332-333. Compiled, authenticated and annotated by Hassan Samahi Sweidan, Dar Ibn Kuthayyir, Beirut, 1st edition, 2011.

the Lausanne Treaty in 1923[10]. The treaty officially abrogated all rights to foreign concessions, and delineated the international borders of the Turkish State against the will of its people. Thus was turned the page of the Ottoman Empire which had existed for six centuries and had come to symbolize Islamic unity. The Islamic world embarked on a new era where it was assailed by colonial powers and systematically torn apart. These powers destroyed values, violated the Islamic identity, and negatively impacted on the actions of individuals and groups as governments deviated from the logic of good governance. Hearts were thus filled with a sense of urgency to join efforts in order to edify an Islamic unity.

Modern connotations of Islamic unity:

With the end of World War I and the profound changes it generated on life, in thought, and in government regimes and life styles, the concept of Islamic unity acquired new connotations distinct by their interconnectedness in content and contradictions in outputs, as diverse as the ebb and flow in their moderation or extremism, matching the political and intellectual climate that prevailed then. Connotations and implications were multiple and diverse, and new political concepts emerged that either clashed, collided or converged

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(10) The Arnauts, sometimes referred to the Treaty of Lausanne II (signed on 24 July 1923 in Lausanne, Switzerland) set out the status of Anatolia and Eastern Thrace (European part of Turkey today) by abrogating the Treaty of Sevres. The Lausanne Treaty redefined the borders of several countries such as Greece, Bulgaria and Turkey and the Levant States. This colonial treaty was the final blow to Islamic unity in the form it had taken under the Ottoman Empire before World War I.

with each other, resulting in great confusion in the objectives behind the quest for Islamic unity which went beyond the traditional scope in which it had been evolving from the late 19th century to after World War II. The development witnessed in the concept of Islamic unity reflected an unhealthy evolution of political thought and the emergence of political currents of which the advocates managed to impose their theses on intellectual and cultural elites and decision-makers in the countries of the Islamic world. Unity became a political slogan exploited by some for personal gain. The advocacy of unity became a means of political jugglery, which was more dangerous than the material deception punishable by law. Many crimes were perpetrated against Arabs in the name of unity, and many crises ravaged some Arab countries, tore them apart, weakened them and drowned them in chaos under the same motto. Many of the setbacks experienced by the Islamic Ummah in general were the result of an unscrupulous exploitation of unity and a distortion of what it stands for.

Four theories of unity:

The state of intellectual regression and division and the manipulation of the destiny of Muslim peoples were behind the ambiguity and confusion that affected the concept of Islamic unity in its general connotations. We came face to face with four theories of unity, with starkly differing objectives, clashing contents and divergent dimensions, and all failed:

- The **visionary unity** in which all Arab peoples come together within one Arab political entity, referred to as the nationalist state.

- The **ideal unity** which brings Muslim peoples together under a unified political system, or what is referred to in Islamic political literature as the revival and renewal of the Islamic caliphate.

- The **realistic unity** that unifies one people through the harmony of its members and their unity under a fully sovereign state in accordance with the provisions of international law, i.e. the national state.

- The **impossible unity** according to which all the peoples of the world coalesce within the same melting pot, a leftist Marxist theory that launched the slogan 'Workers of the World Unite!' and that prevailed in some Arab countries, especially during the first half of the twentieth century, in following and emulation of the Soviet Union which was then at the height of its tyranny, human rights violation and corruption on earth.

The Arab world tried the ideal unity theory, albeit only at the intellectual and aspirational level, and was preoccupied with this theory for a certain length of time. Reverberating in the Arab world at some point was also the echo of the ideal unity theory. For many years, unitary ideas that were totally disconnected from reality spread, and experiences were engaged in but soon proved their failings and were discarded. Political parties came into existence raising nationalist banners and failed in their project, harming in the process the concept, project and theory of unity. But the one experience that endured and benefited to people was the realist unity theory which reached maturity and took shape in the rise of the national state that enjoys full sovereignty over its territory in accordance with international laws. The national state was the starting point in the establishment of the rules of a regional grouping that saw light in 1945 under the name of the League of Arab States

and which began with seven Arab countries that gradually increased in number to reach twenty-two countries today. The national state was a solid foundation for the establishment of a broader alliance at the level of the Islamic world under the name of the **Organization of Islamic Cooperation**. The OIC started out with twenty-five countries and expanded its membership to comprise fifty-seven Islamic world countries today.

The opinion of Malik Ibn Nabi on unity:

In his profound and candid analysis of the civilizational structure underlying the concept of political unity, the thinker Malik Ibn Nabi says: 'What happened tothe Islamic world is that it came to the realization that unity was a key issue, and that no civilizational formation can be created out of the hodge-podge of elements and policies available on the ground today. It is indeed difficult to use the term 'politics' in reference to these chaotic attempts resorted to by various leaders. It is more apt to speak of 'politica' when describing all manners of confusion, illusions and myths and all forms of deliberate deceit. The difference between the two terms is as immense as the difference between fortuity or emotion, and leadership inspired from human experiences throughout history. This cunning 'politica' engaged in by leaders is nothing short of muddling the possible with the impossible, and abandoning goals that can be directly achieved for what cannot be reached no matter how desperately we cling to utopian means.'[11]

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(11) Malik Ibn Nabi: *Civilizational Issues: Where the Islamic World is Headed*, p. 119, translated by Abdul Saboor Shaheen with a preface by Ammar Talbi, Islamic Renaissance Thought series, Bibliotheca Alexandrina, Dar Al-Kitab Al-Masri, Cairo, Dar Al-Kitab Al-Lubnani, Beirut, 2012. The term used by the author is perhaps what is known today as politicized politics in description of bogus politics.

If Western colonialism has succeeded–particularly with the racist Touranian nationalism - to overthrow the Islamic caliphate in March 1924, causing the implosion of the unity fabric in most countries of the far-flung Islamic world, the great jurist Dr Abdul Razzaq Al-Sanhoury wrote in the following month (April 1924) about Islam's ability and suitability to serve as a federating element for oriental nations, indicating that two of Islam's principles make it an all-inclusive enclosure for a league of nations that would not succumb to weaknesses. These principles are the equality of all peoples and individuals, no Arab being better than a non-Arab except by the degree of his piety, and proclaiming that Islam is open to all human beings, and that it is the religion of the entire humanity. Edifying the Islamic league over new bases to become an assembly of oriental nations opens the way for non-racist nations and ethnicities and at the same brings together the peoples, nations and nation states of the Orient around the rallying factor of Islam. This was the dream and most important preoccupation of Al-Sanhoury.

A league of oriental nations:

For Al-Sanhoury, this 'Islamic Orient' was the 'league of oriental nations' brought together through the association of Islam. It is a religious renaissance, a federation of nations and a decentralized league. This is the original theory of Islamic unity as described by Al-Sanhoury in his book '**The Jurisprudence of Caliphate and its Evolution into a League of Oriental Nations**'. The book was translated from French into Arabic by his daughter Dr Nadia Abdul Razzaq Al-Sanhoury, with a review and preface by Dr Tawfiq Chaoui (Cairo edition, 1989).[12]

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(12) Dr Mohamed Imara: *Islamiyyat As-Sanhoury Basha: Islamiyat Ad-Dawla, Al-Madaniya wa Al-Umran*, vol. 1, p. 96, Dar Al-Wafaa, 1st edition, Cairo, 2006.

The political unity of oriental nations and peoples was imagined by Al-Sanhoury as the outcome of these peoples' adoption of one and the same Islamic civilizational model and a unified Islamic law and culture. It applies also to the creation of a union in trade, economy and customs, and the adoption of Arabic as a unified official language for government, culture, science, literature and conferences. After all these measures and unification achievements comes political unity[13], following a logical and sequential order, and not as a single leap that bows neither to reason nor to careful planning that takes due consideration of the reality on the ground.

This is a realistic perception that largely differs from the illusions upheld by some intellectuals, cultural elites and political leaders whose connection to reality is flimsy and are unconcerned with the institutional edification of unity among Muslim peoples.

They wander about in the meanders of imagination, and once they come face to face with the true nature of things and with harsh realities, they veer towards deceit to mislead minds, preserve the status they hold and safeguard their material gains, unable to muster enough courage to admit that they are advancing aimlessly and acting blindly.

It is worth of note that Dr Al-Sanhoury used the term '**Islamic Orient**' or the '**league of oriental nations**' instead of the **Islamic World** or **Muslim peoples** since these last two terms were not common in Arabic literature at the time he wrote his PhD dissertation on the jurisprudence of caliphate in French (1925) under the supervision

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(13) Ibid, p. 105.

of a French professor. But the man remains undeniably one of the pioneers of juristic renewal, *ijtihad* in *fiqh* and social reform. He was the first to develop a practical theory of association and unity on the basis of modern laws and under the aegis of Islam, making him without the slightest doubt the founder of the theory of Islamic conference which came into force with creation of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. This organization was founded in 1972 under the name the Organization of Islamic Conference, in relation to the 1st Islamic Summit held in Rabat in 1969. These are the deeply rooted foundations of true Islamic unity which is in all aspects the opposite of idealist and utopian unity theses that are utterly removed from reality.

Consideration of circumstances, challenges and means:

The unity that should be the object of all endeavors is one that takes into account the present circumstances and challenges, means available and the impactful factors. Consideration of this unity does not evolve independently from the changes occurring on the international scene. One of the premises of this unity is the consecration of relations between the unified Islamic Ummah's components and the followers of various religions, doctrines and ethnicities and diverse cultures, all of which constitute the backbone of religious and ethnic groups, each in its own way. This is what is known as plurality within unity or diversity-based unity. And it is on this solid foundation that unity is built, not on flimsy bases. This way, it acquires immunity against the dangers threatening it and becomes a strong and steadfast unity in the face of adversity. This aspect

was not taken into account in past experiences of unity which were ill served by improvisation, impulsiveness and the lack of proper appreciation of the consequences. The result was utter failure, so much so that the mere thought of unity became controversial in a most unconstructive way and even seen by some as an exercise in futility.

The pillars of unity, the rules of solidarity and the principles of cooperation take body in premises such as the premise that all people are equal in rights and obligations, that their religion is one of peace and equity and this religion guarantees global peace and social takaful. From this equality ensue many requirements, most important of which is cooperation in different fields for various purposes and using multiple means, on all internal and external matters, and in ways that serve the vital interests of peoples. This unity is edified on foundations of cooperation, coordination and complementarity and on the basis of a dynamic and impactful Islamic solidarity.

The realistic version of unity:

This realistic and pragmatic version of unity was clearly concretized through the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. The preamble to this Organization's Charter draws the outline of the notion of political unity of Islamic countries, in a way that asserts the immutable truths from which unity draws its elements: "*to preserve and promote the lofty Islamic values of peace, compassion, tolerance, equality, justice and human dignity; to endeavor to work for revitalizing Islam's pioneering role in the world while ensuring sustainable development, progress and prosperity for the peoples of Member States; to enhance and strengthen the bond of unity and solidarity*

among the Muslim peoples and Member States; to respect, safeguard and defend the national sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of all Member States; to contribute to international peace and security, understanding and dialogue among civilizations, cultures and religions and promote and encourage friendly relations and good neighborliness, mutual respect and cooperation; to promote human rights and fundamental freedoms, good governance, rule of law, democracy and accountability in Member States in accordance with their constitutional and legal systems; to promote confidence and encourage friendly relations, mutual respect and cooperation between Member States and other States."

All the objectives and principles of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation amply reflect the true and not virtual version of the unity of the Islamic Ummah's components. Article 1 of CHAPTER I of the Charter lists enumerates those objectives as: "*(1) To enhance and consolidate the bonds of fraternity and solidarity among the Member States; (2) To safeguard and protect the common interests and support the legitimate causes of the Member States and coordinate and unify the efforts of the Member States in view of the challenges faced by the Islamic world in particular and the international community in general; (3) To respect the right of self-determination and non-interference in the domestic affairs and to respect sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of each Member State; (4) To support the restoration of complete sovereignty and territorial integrity of any Member State under occupation, as a result of aggression, on the basis of international law and cooperation with the relevant international and regional organizations; (5) To ensure active participation of the Member States in the global political, economic and social decision-making processes to secure their common interests; (6) To promote*

inter-state relations based on justice, mutual respect and good neighborliness to ensure global peace, security and harmony; (7) To reaffirm its support for the rights of peoples as stipulated in the UN Charter and international law; (8) To support and empower the Palestinian people to exercise their right to self-determination and establish their sovereign State with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital, while safeguarding its historic and Islamic character as well as the Holy places therein; (9) To strengthen intra-Islamic economic and trade cooperation; in order to achieve economic integration leading to the establishment of an Islamic Common Market."

Unity, congregation, solidarity and cooperation are some of the most important associative and collective traits of the human personality. The sound development of the different components of the human personality- whether individual or collective ones - is essential to the integrity and balance of the personality, and consequently of the integrity and stability of society. These are the components of Islamic unity and the conditions necessary for the cohesion of the Muslim community and its steadfastness in the face of the advocates of division who stir the fires of sectarian strife and racial discrimination. There is no doubt that all components and positive contributions to the history of Muslims support their unity and invite to it because they find their inspiration in Islam and its values. It was originally Islam that unified tribes and peoples, guaranteed their equality, created bonds of brotherhood between them and turned the negatives of tribalism and ethnic loyalty into positives that promote equality, brotherhood and solidarity. Mankind was born out of one soul and their differences as distinct peoples and tribes are cause for mutual acquaintance and symbiosis. The differences in tongues and colors are a manifestation of the miracle of God's creation and the perfection of Allah's fashioning of Man in perfect image, and

none of this should be used as reason or a tool for arrogance, rivalry and belligerence.[14]

The soaring edifice of the great Islamic entity:

This soaring and sturdy edifice of Islamic unity and alliance on the basis of the religious and cultural sense of affiliation that unifies all components of the Islamic Ummah is the embodiment of the Islamic civilizational project, representing a profoundly significant and broad renewal. The unity project thus acquires its constitutional and legal legitimacy and is no longer a mere intellectual theorization, a politicized conception or a slogan whisked out whenever the need arises.

Therefore, one of the most effective and impactful means for strengthening the body of the Islamic Ummah and unifying its ranks is working towards the rapprochement of its religious and ethnic components by rallying all opinions into one voice on all issues of interest to the Ummah's present and future, developing sound political bases for joint Islamic action, and outlining the paths leading to this rapprochement and from there to reaching common goals and the means conducive to their fulfillment. This form of broad political and intellectual rapprochement is not a compulsory or artificial process, nor is it a political move aimed at covering up some weakness or deficiency, but is instead a genuine process imposed by a number of reality-anchored facts.[15]

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(14) Dr Abdulaziz Othmane Altwaijri: *Thought on the Path of Renewal*, p. 34, Dar As-Salam li Al-Teba'a wa Al-Nashr wal Al-Tawzi' wal Tarjama, Cairo, 2015.
(15) Idem.

Consolidating kinship ties - in their broad and deep sense - between the components of the Islamic Ummah, and strengthening the bonds of brotherliness, concord and convergence around one word, can only be achieved by strengthening joint Islamic action based on cooperation, partnership, coordination, and complementarity within mutual respect. These are the alternatives for a union that harnesses sovereignty differences between states and transcends nationalist specificities. These are also the means available and likely to preserve the higher interests of the Islamic world, to overcome the difficulties hindering its drive to instate stability, prosperity and progress, establish security, social peace and harmony, and to meet the challenges surrounding Islamic states and hampering global sustainable development efforts.

Joint Islamic action:

Based on this pragmatic concept of unity, the formula of joint Islamic action within the framework of the OIC and the organizations operating under its aegis, such as the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO) and the Islamic Development Bank, is an Islamic unity project that aims to close ranks and bring Muslim peoples closer together in various fields and at different levels in order to achieve the global sustainable development that has become one of the challenges facing the Islamic Ummah today. Real unity that can stand fast and is not affected by transient political changes is a unity that is seated on a solid foundation of cooperation and partnership, geared to achieve further development in the first place, and fend off any threats to security and peace. The architects of this unity and its advocates endeavor to concretize it and bolster its foundations by bringing about the conditions of a better

human life and an improved social climate, developing economic conditions and identifying the means and ways of building a society of prosperity and wellbeing over phases that have been carefully pondered. This type of political action, driving towards building unity, is what achieves the goals behind any serious and successful unity experience.

Unity comes in degrees which do not necessarily clash with each other. Gone is the era when unity experiments were based on emotion, fervor and improvisation. Today, the Islamic world is at a juncture that could be best described as a 'stage of unity-focused vigilance'. It is shedding, albeit slowly and painstakingly, the remnants of utopian ideas and policies that have accumulated over time and resulted in many missed opportunities to develop the Islamic world and relieve it of the negative pressures that have weighed in on its present and future. In this respect, we would do well to remember the unity trends that prevailed in the aftermath of World War I when certain voices called for the reinstatement of the caliphate, voices that soon waned before almost entirely lapsing into silence. In this critical juncture, radical Islamist groups have emerged, calling for the re-establishment of the caliphate as a symbol of Islamic unity. Yet, they are committing such crimes against humanity as to bring great prejudice to Muslims wherever they may be. Their despicable terrorist operations are projecting a distorted and repulsive image of the Islam they claim to be defending through *jihad*.

Tackling impediments to unity:

No different from this distorted model is the sectarian radical project that is pervading the Islamic world today, particularly in certain Arab countries. This project is presented as an Islamic unity endeavor

by its proponents who hold annual conferences around this theme to serve their expansionist goals which are to destroy Islamic unity instead of building it and divide instead of unite.

To lay down the rules of Islamic unity, it is necessary to tackle the impediments of this unity. These include doctrinal and nationalist fanaticism, radicalism and *takfir* (excommunication), pushing conflict to the point of belief vs. disbelief instead of correctness vs. error, berating the other for his words when he denies such words, narrow-minded dialogue, the denigration of sanctities, the forceful imposition of a specific doctrine on others, and engaging in provocative actions that breed chaos and discord and similar other detrimental deeds. Add to these impediments the inability of educational programs and curricula to instill a culture of respect, coexistence and friendship among Muslims, the distortion of historical facts and the explanation of historical events from a sectarian or doctrinal angle, the lack of respect towards the companions of the Prophet (PBUH) and his wives, considered the mothers of Muslims (may Allah be pleased with them), denigrating them with great insolence despite the Quranic Surahs revealed in their praise and that confirmed their status as blessed and absolved by Allah. Such disrespect was never witnessed in the early days of Islam nor did it affect any of the imams of Al-Bayt (may Allah be pleased with them). Other impediments include keeping quiet before the manifestations of fanaticism and extremism out of complacence for the adherents of a particular doctrine and to ensure that they remain indoctrinated and exploited for malicious purposes, the weakness of Arabic language teaching and mastery to extents where most people are unable to read the masterpieces of Islamic history or understand the sources of their culture to gain firsthand knowledge of the fundamentals of religion and the facts of history. Add to this allowing the influence of policies

imposed by foreign powers that have a vested interest in breaking the ranks of Islamic unity, favoring sectarian or ethnic interests or fleeting political interests over the greater good of Islam, the inability of certain scholars from different backgrounds to accomplish their duty of bringing about true rapprochement and reconciliation that are based on respect and sincerity, on highlighting the true face of this noble religion, exposing fallacies and refuting accusations.

This brief review of the general conditions prevailing in the countries of the Islamic world and which are undermining the endeavors to unify ranks, banish differences and counter the effects of division and discord, is the best gateway out of this impasse. These obstacles -which are in fact the impediments to unity-, are the result of a political situation that negates rational governance, opposes Islamic brotherliness and contradicts the principles of cohesion, *takaful* and solidarity among peoples. In such a context, marred by differences and conflicts that abound in the Islamic world, it is impossible to reach the minimum level desired of a solid unity that is capable of weathering these storms.

A federating Islamic brotherhood:

As Sheikh Mohammed Abu Zahra said, Islamic brotherhood is founded on three principles that are all related to morals and virtue, where no one is repressed or victimized because of fanaticism. The first one is the sense of brotherliness experienced among Muslims, true to Allah's verse: [***The Believers are but a single Brotherhood: So make peace and reconciliation between your two (contending) brothers; and fear Allah, that ye may receive Mercy.***] (*Al-Hujurat*, verse 10). Secondly, a cultural, linguistic and

social brotherhood that unites all in the fight against detrimental dogmas to curb their spread among believers in particular, and among the general public and thus prevent corruption on earth. Thirdly, that no war should be waged by a Muslim region against another, regardless of the methods of this war and whether it is waged through the economy or through an alliance against other Muslims.[16] Islamic brotherliness is the binding cement of unity and its beating heart. And for this reason, resolving the political differences that undermine the supreme interests of the Islamic world and working towards strengthening fraternal ties between the components of the Islamic Ummah must be the first step taken to consolidate the ties of brotherliness among these components. It is no secret that the brotherhood can be one of religion, just as it can be one of homeland and of humanity, regardless of differences in creeds.

Based on these deeply-rooted principles, and on a well-defined conception of Islam, strategic awareness in building Islamic unity rises to the fore in this current phase which is replete with challenges for the Islamic world, where the crises facing this world have multiplied and the pace of changes is accelerating at all levels. As said earlier, unity comes in degrees and it also occurs in stages, following specific considerations that cannot be ignored. For this reason, cooperation, partnership and solidarity among Muslim peoples is the realistic formula best suited for Islamic unity, being consistent with modern time changes and meeting the requirements of the development to which we aspire as we seek to advance

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(16) Sheikh Mohamed Abu Zahra, ibid. pp. 143-144.

the Ummah, protect its vital interests, preserve its identity and specificities and guarantee that it remains at pace with the spinning wheel of human progress.

The Mecca Declaration, published in January 1981 at the end of the 3rd Islamic Summit held near the Al-Haram Mosque, expressed this modern conception of Islamic unity consistent with the spirit of modern times. This historic declaration reads: "*We meet today in this August assembly and in this Serene City on this momentous juncture in the annals of Islam, determined to reinforce our solidarity and set in motion the process of our renaissance. To this end, we make the following solemn declaration:*

1. *All Muslims, differing though they may be, in their language, color, domicile or other conditions, form but one nation, bound together by their common faith, moving in a single direction, drawing on one common faith, cultural heritage, assuming one mission throughout the world. Thus, they stand as a nation of moderation, rejecting alignment to any and all blocs and ideologies, steadfastly refusing to surrender to divisive influences or to conflicts of interests. We are, therefore, determined to move forward to reinforce our solidarity, to overcome rifts and divisions and to settle in a peaceful manner all disputes that may arise amongst us on the basis of covenants and the principles of brotherhood, unity and inter-dependence and on our belief in the justice and compassion derived from the Holy Book of Allah and the Sunnah of His Prophet, which constitute for us the eternal source of justice. In fulfillment of the aspirations of our peoples, we shall intensify consultations, amongst ourselves and complement and coordinate our endeavors in the international field in order to better defend our common causes and thus to enhance our prestige and position in the world.*"

The Declaration goes on to say:

"2. Conscious that Muslims today are victims of innumerable injustices and are faced with multiple dangers due to the reign of force and aggression and the politics of violence in international behavior; and conscious also of the fact that Islam enjoins justice and equity both for its followers and others and it also enjoins tolerance and magnanimity towards those who do not combat us, do not force us to leave our homes, do not violate our sacred values and who never take the side of wrong doing, injustice or oppression. We are saddened to note that despite alt its material scientific and technological achievements, mankind today suffers from poverty of the spirit, from moral and ethical decay, and societies are marred by inequities, economies are crippled by severe crises, and international political order is in constant danger of destabilization. We consider that the innate qualities of the Muslim Ummah point the way to unity and solidarity, to progress and advancement, to prosperity and power. It possesses the Book of God and the Sunnah of the Holy Prophet (peace be upon Him), in them can be found a complete way of life leading us, guiding us along the path of goodness, righteousness, and salvation. This is our cultural heritage. It enables us to break the shackles of subservience and mobilize in us the spiritual strength to utilize to the fullest extent our inherent capabilities. It is our sheet anchor for a righteous life. It is our conviction that the Ummah of 1000 million people[17]*, composed of various races, spread over vast areas of*

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(17) The number of Muslims in the world today exceeds two billion.

> *the globe and possessing enormous resources, fortified by its spiritual power and utilizing to the full its human and material potential, can achieve an outstanding position in the world and ensure for itself the means of prosperity in order to bring about a better equilibrium for the benefit of all mankind.*"

Fairness and integrity dictate that we recognize that the fundamental principles underscored in the Mecca Declaration were not largely espoused as a basis for joint Islamic action. Crises and disputes erupted between several OIC Member States, further destroying the fabric of intra-Islamic relations. One observation that must be made here is that the technical formulation of this important declaration did not aptly and objectively reflect the spirit of the OIC Charter, nor was it drafted in the style usually used with political declarations. The document was riddled with rhetoric which, although it did not affect the content, is not consistent with the requirements of these times.

Islamic unity within a federating regional organization:

The notion of Islamic unity, an Islamic federation or a caliphate evolved in our times into the type of regional formation that was created on the basis of the UN Charter and consequently, of international law. Indeed, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) represents today the largest international formation after the United Nations. But while its achievements have not fully met the Muslim peoples' expectations, having failed to resolve conflicts opposing Muslims in some parts of the Islamic world and to entrench, consolidate and develop Islamic-Islamic relations, this

certainly is no reason to deny or belittle the great role it plays at both the Islamic and international levels as a high-level model of Islamic unity that protects the supreme interests of the Islamic world and defends the rights of its peoples. It is necessary to join efforts in order to further develop this Organization and guarantee a higher level of efficiency. Its mechanisms must be modernized, its political approach as well as its means must be renewed, and its future prospects must be broadened along with the missions entrusted to it. That is how the OIC can rise to a level that enables it to revive the Islamic collective will to unite ranks, further cooperation, broaden the scope of partnership and strengthen Islamic solidarity which is the fortress protecting Islamic unity, on the basis of a fully integrated strategic awareness.

Since it is impossible today to establish one Islamic state that brings together all the peoples of the Islamic world, as was the case in older times, it is essential to work towards strengthening this organization which federates the states of the Islamic world, provide it with the material and human resources necessary for its success and create the necessary conditions for it to succeed in its civilizational mission. It is equally important to respect the decisions flowing from its various conferences and implement them in a spirit of solidarity and symbiosis that gives precedence to general interests and great causes over marginal issues. Thus, this strategic awareness becomes a strategic project that edifies unity, strengthens relations between the components of the Islamic Ummah and frees it from the civilizational impasse hindering its march and stirring the covetousness of some powers.