

POST-9/11 ISLAMOPHOBIA: PROMOTING INTERFAITH HARMONY AND GLOBAL PEACE

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Abstract: The post-9/11 situation has brought several changes in the world and there are winners and losers in this process. Unfortunately, the Muslim World is one of the main losers in this regard. This situation does not help in bringing global peace and prosperity; rather, it creates more problems. This paper is an effort to analyse this situation. It argues that the global media is an important source of informal education. But unfortunately it is dominated by major global players and they use it to influence global opinion by defaming Islam and Muslims. Although this piece of research acknowledges some pro-Islamic views reported in the global media, they are well in minority and thus do not influence the global opinion. This strategy is not helpful in promoting global peace when on several occasions Islam has been branded a violent religion while Muslims are labelled as terrorists. This short piece of research highlights the need for concrete measures and suggests some steps that can be taken for the building of mutual confidence between the Muslim and the non-Muslim world.

Needless to say, the events of the 11 September 2001 have changed the course of history. This transformed global situation in general and that of the Muslim World in particular, raises various questions, e.g., what is the way forward to initiate a process of mutual trust and stability in order to overcome the current crises? How can the Muslim countries play an effective role in global peace and prosperity? Can the major global players help the Muslim World in the promotion of peace and prosperity? This paper attempts to explore answers to these and similar questions. The discussion reflects the importance and the role of the global media with regard to the process of informal mass education and maintenance of global peace. In this context, as argued by Fred Halliday, it is particularly true that 'no subject in contemporary public discussion has attracted more confused discussion than that of relations between 'Islam' and the 'West'.¹ Here, with reference to the

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¹ Fred Halliday, 'West Encountering Islam: Islamophobia Reconsidered', in Ali Mohammadi (ed.), *Islam Encountering Globalisation*, London: Routledge Curzon, 2002, p. 14.

context, I think it would be appropriate to begin with three quotations regarding the Western world's assumptions about Islam in the western world:

As western leaders attempted to forge the New World Order, transnational Islam may increasingly come to be regarded as the new global monolithic enemy of the West (John L. Esposito, *Islamic Threat*, p. 5).

To some Americans searching for a new enemy against whom to try our mettle and power after the death of communism, Islam is the preferred antagonist (P.L. Buchanan, 'Is Islam an Enemy of the US,' *Sunday News*, New Hampshire, 22 December 1990).

Many Americans tend to stereotype Muslims as uncivilized, unwashed, barbaric, irrational people. ... [Islam] will pose a major challenge and the West will be forced to form a new alliance with Moscow to confront a hostile and aggressive Muslim world (Richard Nixon, *Seize the Moment*, pp. 194-95)²

Informal Education: Promotion of Tolerance or Violence?

Informal education refers to learning taking place outside of a formal educational organisation. It is a life-long process by means of which an individual acquires knowledge and skills through day-to-day experience, educative influences and other available resources within his or her reach.³ In recent years the mass media has become the most important source of informal education as well as a force for bringing political change through propaganda. The colossal advances in communications brought about by the use of satellite and computer technology has made 'mass' media what it is, information accessible by all. Sophisticated technology has now made it possible to send a message, such as to preach a gospel not only to hundreds or thousand but also to millions of people spread all over the globe.⁴

Education is at the heart of humanistic development. In the modern age, the goals of future-oriented education are defined by the development process as the collective vision of the 'global village'. In Islamic literature, there is enormous emphasis on the acquisition of knowledge. The first verse of the Quran was a command to the Prophet Mohammad (*pbuh*) to read, learn and understand (Quran, 96: 1-4). According to Quranic teachings, God gave man the ability to observe, think and to write so that he could circulate knowledge broadly and preserve his cultural heritage for coming generations. The World Conference on Education for All (jointly sponsored by UNESCO, UNICEF,

² Quoted in S.M. Koreshi, *New World Order: Western Fundamentalism in Action* (Islamabad: Institute of Policy Studies, 1995), p. 191.

³ R.A. Farooq, *Orientation of Educationists* (Islamabad: Asia Society for Promotion of Innovation and Reforms in Education, 1998), p. 123.

⁴ Shahida Kazi, "The Role of the Mass Media in Creating Awareness about Women's Literacy in Pakistan", in Tahera Aftab (ed.), *Challenge for Change: Literacy for the Girls of Today, the Women of Tomorrow* (Karachi: Centre of Excellence for Women's Studies, 1995), pp. 96-102.

UNDP and the World Bank) held in 1990 at Jomtien (Thailand), adopted the 'World Declaration on Education for All'.⁵ Although in this conference the emphasis was only on the provision of formal basic education to the masses of developing countries in the contemporary age of globalisation, the importance of informal education cannot be underestimated. Unfortunately, whether it is formal or informal education in the post-9/11 era, there is widespread propaganda about the Muslim World. For instance, with regard to the promotion of religious extremism for the politico-strategic interests of the United States through supplying jihad schoolbooks in Afghanistan, Jared Israel uncovered an important point. In his words:

Have you heard about the Afghan Jihad Schoolbook scandal? Because it has been unreported in the Western media that the US government shipped millions of Islamist (that's short for Islamic fundamentalist) textbooks into Afghanistan. According to *Washington Post* investigators, over the past twenty years the US has spent millions of dollars producing fanatical schoolbooks, which were then distributed in Afghanistan. "The primers which were filled with talk of jihad and featured drawing of guns, bullets, soldiers and mines, have served since then as the Afghan school system's core curriculum. Even the Taliban used American-produced books (*Washington Post*, 23 March 2002).⁶

The author of this paper remembers that during mid-2002, BBC Television in its regular news bulletin strongly criticised the Taliban for using these books in schools. However, it was not disclosed who supplied these book to the Taliban. Possibly this is part of the systematised campaign to keep Islam and Muslims out of the circle of any goodwill. This argument is also supported by *The Times Weekend*. In an article entitled 'The West is Still Demonising Islam,' it writes that: '...one religion seems excluded from this circle of goodwill. For nearly a thousand years, the Western world has cultivated a distorted vision of Islam which bears little relation to the truth but which shows no sign of abating, even in the more tolerant climate of today's world. ... The distortions cultivated by the West do not reflect the fact that Islam had for centuries a better record of tolerance... Yet Western people are reluctant to accept this, because their view of "Islam" is bound up with their perception of themselves. ... If Western secularists cannot transcend the negative portrait of Islam that they have inherited, they too, will have failed to live up to their highest ideals.'⁷ Marcel Boisard argued: 'The matter in which the Prophet [Mohammad] and his successors addressed the kings and leaders of non-Muslim people shows that they treated them as equal. ... History shows that Muslim authorities, without

⁵ UNDP, UNESCO, UNICEF and The World Bank, *World Declaration on Education for All and Framework for Action to Meet Basic Learning Needs* (New York: UNDP, UNESCO, UNICEF and The World Bank, 1990).

⁶ Jared Israel, *Bush and the Media Cover-up the Jihad Schoolbook Scandal* <[http:// www. emperors-clothes.com/ articles/ jared/ jihad.htm](http://www.emperors-clothes.com/articles/jared/jihad.htm)>, 15 April 2002.

⁷ *The Times Weekend*, 27 May 2000.

renouncing the universality of Islam, were bound by a certain number of specific legal obligations in their dealings with foreign nations.⁸ Prince Charles also agrees with Boisard. In his lecture at Oxford, he said: 'Medieval Islam was a religion of remarkable tolerance for its times, allowing Jews and Christians the right to practice their inherited beliefs, and setting an example which was not unfortunately, copied for many centuries in the West.'⁹

Thus, is Islam a religion of tolerance or terror? Qureshi argued that 'tolerance' is the basic pillar of Islam.¹⁰ 'The Arabic word *Islam* simply means "submission," and is derived from a word meaning peace.'¹¹ It strongly condemns aggression and terrorism. According to the Islamic philosophy, peace is at one and the same time, an achievement of human beings and a gift of God. It means that human beings have to bring their thoughts and actions into harmony, thus in this way integrity develops, which is fertile soil for the germination and growth of peace. It can safely be argued that this stage is the salvation of every human being.¹²

Global Media

In the context that the global media is an important source of informal education, it would be appropriate to quote Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn who says: 'Such as it is, the press has become the greatest power within the Western World, more powerful than the legislature, the executive and the judiciary. One would like to ask; by whom has it been elected and to whom is it responsible?'¹³ It is beyond doubt that in the current age, the news media, particularly the electronic media, is the most important as well as the most effective source of information. But does the media present a clear and correct picture of day-to-day global events. Unfortunately, in the views of Johann Galtung, a distinguished academician, the answer is 'no'.¹⁴ With regard to the coverage of

⁸ Marcel A. Boisard, *Humanism in Islam* (Indianapolis: America Trust Publications, 1986), p. 160.

⁹ Prince Charles, a lecture delivered on 27 October, 1993 at Oxford University. Quoted in S.M. Koreschi, *New World Order: Western Fundamentalism in Action* (Islamabad: Institute of Policy Studies, 1995), pp. 204-05.

¹⁰ Moin Qureshi, 'Islamic Civilisation,' *The Daily Dawn: Internet Edition* <<http://www.DAWN.com>>, 26 May 2000.

¹¹ Embassy of Saudi Arabia (Washington), *Understanding Islam and Muslims*, Cambridge: Islamic Text Society, 1989, p. 3.

¹² Quran (59: 23)

¹³ Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn quoted in David Duke, *Who Runs the Media?* <http://www.duke.org/awakening/chapter19_01.html>, 15 December 2001.

¹⁴ Johann Galtung is a Professor of Peace Studies in the United States.

violence, he laid down 12 points of concern where the impartiality of the media is in question.¹⁵

- i) Decontextualising violence: focusing on the irrational without looking at the reasons for unresolved conflicts and polarization.
- ii) Dualism: reducing the number of parties in a conflict to two, when often more are involved. Stories that just focus on internal developments often ignore such outside or 'external' focus as foreign governments and transnational companies.
- iii) Mechanism: Portraying one side as good and demonising the other as 'evil'.
- iv) Armageddon: presenting violence as inevitable, omitting alternatives.
- v) Focusing on individual acts of violence while avoiding structural causes, like poverty, government neglect and military or police repression.
- vi) Confusion: focusing only on the conflict arena (i.e., the battlefield or location of incidents) but not on the forces and factors that influence the violence.
- vii) Excluding and omitting the bereaved, thus never explaining why there are acts of revenge and spirals of violence.
- viii) Failure to explore the causes of escalation and the impact of media coverage itself.
- ix) Failure to explore the goals of outside interventions, especially big powers.
- x) Failure to explore peaceful proposals and offer images of peaceful outcomes.
- xi) Confusing cease-fires and negotiations with actual peace.
- xii) Omitting reconciliation: conflicts tend to re-emerge if attention is not paid to efforts to heal fractured societies. When news about attempts to resolve conflicts is absent, fatalism is reinforced. That can help engender even more violence, when people have no images or information about possible peaceful outcomes and the promise of healing.

Whether it is the post-9/11 situation, or the Gulf War, Palestine-Israel conflict, dispute between India and Pakistan over Kashmir, Afghanistan, Balkan region, Western Sahara or East Timor; careful consideration highlights the validity of Galtung's points. Several examples can be quoted in this regard. For instance, in an article in *The Independent*, Middle East correspondent Robert Fisk, says:

¹⁵ Quoted by Danny Schechter, *Covering Violence: How Should Media Handle Conflicts?* <<http://www.mediachannel.org/views/dissector/coveringviolence.shtml>>, 28 May 2002.

In a major surrender to Israeli diplomatic pressure, BBC officials in London have banned their staff in Britain and the Middle East from referring to Israel's policy of murdering its guerrilla opponents as "assassination". BBC reporters have been told that in future they are to use Israel's own euphemism for the murders, calling them "targeted killings". ... Up to 60 Palestinian activists – numerous civilians, including two children killed last week – have been gunned down by Israeli death squads or missile-firing Israeli helicopter pilots. The White House has gently chided Israel about these attacks, but already this week the BBC has been using the phrase "targeted attacks" for the policy of murder. Palestinian killing of Israelis, however, is regularly referred to – accurately – as "murder" or "assassination".¹⁶

Unfortunately the image of Muslims as projected by the media is often distorted, fragmented and clouded by fast changing global events. 'Sometimes, a selective and unfamiliar aspect of a particular Muslim country's social behaviour is projected as if it were a universally practiced tradition of Islam. The entertainment industry, especially the film-makers in Hollywood, with very few exceptions, have shown deep bias presenting Arabs or Muslims of the Third World countries as uncouth, uncivilised and rogues.'¹⁷

Propaganda Model

Kevin Doyle in his article entitled 'Anyone for a Brain Wash?', quotes the theory of the 'propaganda model' presented by Herman and Chomsky. According to this concept, instead of producing the required facts about the global situation, modern media shapes and reshapes news through a systematised doctoring process in which some of the facts are under-reported or misreported while others are totally ignored.¹⁸ This is a completely unjustified approach to the informal education of the global masses. This situation promotes division within the 'global village', which enhances global human insecurity and instability, and can be observed more clearly after 9/11. Unfortunately, in the contemporary uni-polar world, without any independent and impartial enquiry, the US government and its intelligence agencies, which have a strong influence on global media, are blaming Islam and Muslims for the events of 9/11. If some Arab Muslims are branded terrorists, it does not prove that over a billion Muslims of the world are responsible for this tragedy. Charley Reese supports this idea and argues that: 'I wish more Americans had an opportunity to get to know Muslims. Then they would not be susceptible to the

¹⁶ Robert Fisk, 'BBC Staff are Told Not to Call Israeli Killings 'Assassination'', *The Independent*, 4 August 2001.

¹⁷ True Islam, *The Perception of Islam* <<http://www.trueislam.free-online.co.uk/islamophobia/perception.htm>>, 23 May 2002.

¹⁸ Kevin Doyle, *Anyone for a Brain Wash?* <http://flag.blackened.net/revolt/ws98/ws54_media.html>, 22 May 2002.

silly anti-Muslim propaganda. ... Muslims are good folks.’¹⁹ This argument is also supported by the Stockholm International Forum on Combating Intolerance held in January 2001. The Forum ‘condemned prejudice against Muslims and called on governments to combat it just as they often have committed themselves to fighting racism, anti-Semitism, and xenophobia.’²⁰

Noam Chomsky is a famous American scholar. ‘No one disputes that Chomsky revolutionised the study of languages more than 40 years ago. The rich and powerful have no quarrel with his work as the world’s most significant linguist. But as a political analyst, he is pretty much persona non grata at big US networks and influential dailies. At major media outlets, most editors seem far more interested in facile putdowns of Chomsky than in allowing space for his own words. Since September 11, the distortions have been predictable. Although he is an unequivocal opponent of terrorism in all its forms, he is portrayed as an apologist for terrorism.’²¹

Distortion of Realities

Unfortunately, the above discussion reflects that, with few exceptions, the global media presents a distorted picture of Islam and Muslims. Most of the energies of Muslim countries and communities are being spent to prove that they are not intolerant, violent and trouble creators. The destruction of the centuries’ old Babri Mosque by Hindu extremists in India can be presented as an example in this regard. Although the attainment of peace and human security should be of prime importance, how can it be justified that millions of Muslims should forget this incident by giving up their legal and moral demand for the restoration of the Mosque. It is noteworthy that rather than highlighting the root cause of the trouble, CNN projected a so-called ‘compromised offer on Indian temple’ made by an extremist Hindu leader in which he says: ‘I appeal to Muslim brothers to stop raising objections about the undisputed land that VHP [Vishwa Hindu Parishad] wants. The solution to end the hatred between the two communities is to hand over the Ram Janambhomi [birthplace of Lord Rama] to Hindus.’²² One may wonder whether it is an offer of compromise or continuation of oppression. From the above discussion, it is not difficult to judge how the Media distorts and keeps the global masses ignorant of ground realities. Similar views are also presented by the former president of CBS News,

¹⁹ Charley Reese, *Muslims are Good Folks*

<<http://www.shianews.com/hi/articles/politics/0000234.php>>, 22 May 2002.

²⁰ Paul Goble, “World: Analysis from Washington – Combating Islamophobia”, *Radio Liberty – Radio Free Europe*

<<http://www.rferl.org/nca/features/2001/02/01022001111334.asp>>, 23 May 2002.

²¹ Arab Media Watch, *Noam Chomsky: Saying What Media Don’t Want Us to Hear* <<http://www.arabmediawatch.Com/reports/reading/art7.htm>>, 28 May 2002.

²² CNN, *Compromise Offer on Indian Temple* <<http://www.worldnews.printthis.clickability.Com/...>>, 6 March 2002.

former president of NBC and former chief of staff of the *New York Times*. In their own words:

Our job is to give people not what they want, but what we decide they ought to have (Richard Salent, Former President CBS News).²³

News is what someone wants to suppress. Every thing else is advertising (Rubin Frank, Former President NBC).²⁴

There is no such thing, at this date of the world's history, as an independent press. You know it and I know it. There is not one of you who dare to write your honest opinions, and if you did, you know before hand that it would never appear in print. I am paid weekly for keeping my honest opinions out of the paper I am connected with. Others of you are paid similar salaries for similar things, and any of you who would be so foolish as to write honest opinion would be out on the streets looking for another job. If I allowed my honest opinions to appear in one issue of my paper, before twenty-four hours my occupation would be gone. The business of the journalist is to destroy the truth; to lie outright; to prevent; to vilify; to fawn at the feet of Mammon, and to sell the country for his daily bread. You know it, I know it, and what folly is this toasting an independent press. We are the tools and vassals of the rich men behind the scenes. We are jumping jacks, they pull the strings and we dance. Our talents, our possibilities and our lives are all the property of other men. We are intellectual prostitutes (John Swinton, Former Chief of Staff, *New York Times*).²⁵

The above statements are also supported by Carol Valentine, a famous American writer. In her article entitled 'Press Uses Actors in War on Islam', she reveals:

The Washington Times had faked two photos in its coverage of the War on Islam. One actor was used twice: first as an enemy of America, then nine days later, as a friend of America. ... On October 20, 2001, *The Washington Times* ran an 8x6 inches color photo above the fold on the front page. The caption under the photo reads: "Face of hate: A Muslim man looks up at the stage as he prays at an anti-America rally in Peshawar, Pakistan. ... On October 29, *The Washington Times* featured another photograph, again credited to Gerald Herbert, this one measuring 8x5 inches. It also appeared above the fold. The caption under the photo reads: Friends and relatives of Afghan military opposition commander Abdul Haq pray at a gathering at his home in Peshawar, Pakistan yesterday. The legendary mujahideen leader was captured and executed by the Taliban in southern Afghanistan. ... This shame illustrates the contrived nature of the War

²³ What Really Happened, *Media "Distortions"* <[http:// www. whatreallyhappened. Com/ RANCHO/LIE/ lie.html](http://www.whatreallyhappened.Com/RANCHO/LIE/lie.html)>, 5 May 2002.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.* The website reveals that these comments were passed by Swinton in prestigious New York Press Club. Swinton is a highly respected personality and due to his

on Islam. It indicates that those who run the press in America are those who designed this war. ... This country is slaughtering thousands of Afghans who have committed no crimes against us, in order to steel Afghani mineral and oil wealth, to trigger a larger war against other Islamic nations.²⁶

Islam or 'Islamophobia'?

What is Islamophobia? The Runnymede Trust defines this concept as the 'unfounded hostility towards Islam. It also refers to the practical consequences of such hostility in unfair discrimination against Muslim individuals and communities, and to the exclusion of Muslims from mainstream political and social affairs.'²⁷ William Dalrymple argues that 'such prejudices against Muslims – and the spread of idiotic stereotypes of Muslim behaviour and beliefs – and anti-Muslim racism now seems in many ways to be replacing anti-Semitism as the principal Western expression of bigotry against the other.'²⁸

The above discussion highlights the fact that the misunderstandings concerning Islam and the Muslim World, and the barrage of global media propaganda, have created an environment of mutual distrust between the Muslim and the Non-Muslim worlds (particularly the Western World). The Western press, especially American and British newspapers, play a leading role in presenting a negative image of Islam. In 1992, a 'London Times cartoon showed a Muslim wiping a blood-stained sword on a union flag, with a murdered woman behind him.'²⁹ In its report on Islamophobia The Runnymede Trust's comments about this cartoon is as follows: 'A further stock image is the evil Muslim. He appears in cartoons not to raise a laugh but to send a shiver down the spine. He is shown here shortly after committing an unusually brutal murder. The accompanying article [Bernard Levin, *The Times*, 13 January 1992, © Peter Brookes] makes it clear that he is wiping his crescent-shaped sword clean with a Union Jack because he is contemptuous of British hospitality, yet also confident that liberal do-gooders and multiculturalists in Britain will not

command on his profession, he was called 'The Dean of His Profession' by his colleagues.

²⁶ Carol A. Valentine, "Press Uses Actors in War on Islam" <<http://www.public-action.com/911/casting.html>>, 2 April 2002.

²⁷ The Runnymede Trust – Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia, *Islamophobia a Challenge for Us All*, London: The Runnymede Trust, 1997, p. 4.

²⁸ William Dalrymple quoted in Jeremy Henzell-Thomas, "The Language of Islamophobia". Paper presented in a Conference on *Exploring Islamophobia*, jointly organised by FAIR (Forum Against Islamophobia and Racism), City Circle and Ar-Rum at the University of Westminster, London, 29 September 2001.

²⁹ Robert Fisk, "The West's Fear of Islam is no Excuse for Racism", *The Independent*, 3 November 1999.

pursue him with all the rigour of law, since he committed the murder for the believers; good Muslim reasons.³⁰

Another cartoon appeared in a September 2002 issue of the weekly *Economist* in which a skeleton-shaped person, fully covered with traditional Islamic dress was holding a crescent like blade of a sword, tied with a rotten stick. The person is throwing darts at the American map. A careful consideration of this cartoon reflects that Islam is an outdated, horrible and violent religion. It further indicates that Muslims are a bad flock and the only enemy of America.³¹ Unfortunately, even children's entertainment does not escape from hostility against Islam. Siddiqi (a distinguished professor of journalism and public relations in the United States) argues: 'Muslims were shocked and surprised to note that in one of the most popular Disney movies for children, *The Lion King*, when the evil-natured hyenas were shown, a crescent appears on the horizon. The crescent has been used as an Islamic symbol in many of the Muslim arts and paintings. Equating darkness and evil with Islam is yet another way to dehumanise Muslims and portray them as enemies.'³² Is this the picture of Islam, which the press wants to project? The Muslim World is particularly irritated by the global media's use of certain terms of categorisation such as, fundamentalism, terrorism, isolation, rogue state. In many cases the governments of most Muslim countries spend an inordinate amount of their time and energy trying to prove that they are not supporting fundamentalism and terrorism.

Terms such as 'isolation' and 'sanctions' are not only harmful to the Muslim World but also to humankind in general. The economic deprivation and sufferings imposed upon a country through the policies of containment, isolation and sanctions are bound to result in frustration and disparity. Iran, Iraq, Sudan and Afghanistan are only a few examples in this regard. Abdul Qader Tash (22 June 1997), editor in chief of the *Arab News*, in referring to the Western media image of Islam, put it rightly when he said:

A distorted image of Islam and Arabs has unfortunately been a feature of the American media for over a century. According to Professor Jack Shaheen of the University of Southern Illinois (author of *The TV Arab* and internationally recognised authority on the subject of anti-Arab and anti-Islam stereotypes in the US), in the past 100 years, Hollywood has produced more than 700 films whose contents vilify Islam and Arabs. Extending his study beyond Hollywood films, Shaheen also examined more than 250 comic books published during the past 50 years. He also looked at hundreds of children's cartoons and more than 450 children's films, from an early one in 1893 to Walt Disney's *Aladdin* in

³⁰ The Runnymede Trust (The Commission on British Muslim and Islamophobia), *Islamophobia a Challenge for Us All* (London: The Runnymede Trust, 1997), p. 23.

³¹ "Lexington: A Ghastly Probability", *The Economist*, 14 September 2002, p. 52.

³² Mohammad Ahmadullah Siddiqi, *Islam, Muslims and Media: Myths and Realities* (Chicago: NAAMPS Publications, 1997), p. 38.

1993. [In his own words], [h]is conclusion is: 'My research has indicated that the terms 'Arab' and 'Muslim' draw a hostile reaction from the public as they find it difficult to differentiate between reality and imagination. Perhaps no people anywhere in the world, other than 270 million Arabs, have been so grossly misunderstood. Similarly Islam, the faith of over a billion Muslims, including 6-8 million in the United States, is the religion that has suffered more than any other because of general ignorance about it.'³³

Tash further argued that:

The religion [Islam] and its followers are being maligned. The systematic distortion of their image is no longer a minor irritant that can be ignored. Some of those who have made a study of this phenomenon call it 'Islamophobia', indicating thereby that the campaign has its roots in a morbid fear of Islam and that in the course of time, it will arouse the same fear in the public mind. The end result they believe will be the creation of a climate of hatred and distaste in these societies for everything Islamic. A number of Western thinkers and intellectuals have begun addressing the problem and warning people of its consequences. One such warning came recently from Professor Gordon Conway of Sussex University in Britain. Discussing the issue, he said that a careful look at the print media in particular would show the extent of anti-Muslim sentiments. In the tabloids, he pointed out, the attack against Islam was usually harsh and savage while in more respected papers it was subtler.³⁴

Anti-Islamic sentiments have increasingly become more publicly pronounced following the global resurgence of Islam. The above discussion reflects the real picture of the global situation in which a negative picture of Muslims and Islam is being painted. This is one of the main reasons that the Muslim population all over the world suffers more than any other religion. This situation can also be seen in *Economist – Millennium Special Edition*, in which a picture of God was published along with the following comments: 'After a lengthy career, the Almighty recently passed into history. ... Few ordinary folk, though they had different names for him, doubted the reality of God. He was up there somewhere (up, not down; in his long career, no one ever located him on the seabed), always had been, and always should be. ... Yet why bother with proof, if everyone knew it anyway? One, because great brains are like that; two, because not everyone did. Out there were the gentiles, Saracens and such. But did not they too say, 'There is no God but God'.'³⁵ Anybody having even the slightest knowledge of Islam can clearly understand the meaning of this statement, the last sentence in particular. Is this a direct attack on Islam or merely a polite way to insult the second largest religion in the world?

³³ *Arab News*, "The West's Clouded View of Arabs and Islam" <<http://www.arab.nrt/arabview/articles/tash27.html>>, 22 June 1997.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Economist – Millennium Special Edition*, 31 December 1999, p. 135.

In his article published in early 2002 in an issue of the *Newsweek*, Woodward tries at least to prove that Islam is a religion of violence, and the Quran is full of confusion and repetition. He challenges the Muslim belief of whether the Quran is really the word of God. However, in contrast he praised Christianity and Jesus Christ. He writes: 'Muhammad was not only a prophet but also a military commander who led Muslim armies into battle. Jesus, on the other hand, refused even to defend himself against the Roman soldiers who arrested him in the Garden of Gethsemane after he was betrayed with a kiss by Judas, one of his own disciples. The difference helps explain the contrasting attitudes towards war and violence in the Quran and the New Testament.'³⁶ Similarly, in an interview, the US Attorney General John Ashcroft said: 'Islam is a religion in which God requires you to send your son to die for Him. Christianity is a faith in which God sends His son to die for you.'³⁷ Due to ignorance of history and Muslim civilisation, similar views have been expressed by Reverend Jerry Falwell, a leading member of the Southern Baptist Convention. In October 2002, he said: 'I think Mohammed was a terrorist. ... He was a violent man, a man of war. ... In my opinion, Jesus set the example for love, as did Moses, and I think Mohammed set an opposite example'.³⁸ It is noteworthy that in spite of protests and condemnations of various Muslim organisations and leaders all over the world, US mainstream leaders remained silent on Falwell's statement.

Unfortunately, after the 9/11 tragedy, hostility against Muslims has increased all over the world, as a large number of journalists, academicians and politicians are drum beating about Islamic terrorism. Jeremy Lott writes in *The American Prospect*: 'Ann Coulter, the notorious bomb throwing lawyer/pundit, wrote a post-September 11 column for *National Review Online* in which she cautioned restraints in the coming months. ... [She argued] We [American] had been "invaded by a fanatical murderous cult" – Muslims – and should therefore "invade their countries, kill their leaders and convert them to Christianity."³⁹ This is not a unique example of its kind as an even harsher view is presented by a journalist – Rich Lowry of the *National Review Online* in which he introduces the idea of 'Nuking Mecca', the holiest place of Islam. In its website, CAIR quotes his following statement:

³⁶ Kenneth L. Woodward, "In the Beginning: There Were the Holy Books", *Newsweek*, 11 February 2002.

³⁷ Americans United for Separation of Church and State, *Ashcroft's Statement on Islam shows Ongoing Pattern of Religious Insensitivity - Attorney General should Drop Religious Agenda* <<http://www.au.org/press/pr021202.htm>>, 7 March 2002.

³⁸ BBC, "Muslim Anger at Prophet Slur" <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/2304179.stm>>, 7 October 2002.

³⁹ Jeremy Lott, *National Review's Editor Suggests Nuking Mecca: We Are Not Kidding* <<http://www.prospect.org/print-friendly/webfeatures/2002/03/lott-j-03-11.html>>, 7 September 2002. Also see: CAIR – The Council on American Islamic Relations [http, <www.cair-net.org/asp/article.asp?articleid=687&articletype=>>, 7 September 2002.

Lots of sentiment for nuking Mecca. Moderates opt for something more along these lines: Baghdad and Tehran would be the likeliest sites for a first strike. If we have clean enough bombs to assure a pinpoint damage area, Gaza City and Ramallah would also be on list. Damascus, Cairo, Algiers, Tripoli and Riyadh should be put on alert that any sign of support for the attacks in their cities will bring immediate annihilation. ... This is a tough one, and I don't know quite what to think. Mecca seems extreme, of course, but then again few people would die and it would send a signal. Religions have suffered such catastrophic setbacks before... And, as a general matter, the time for seriousness – including figuring out what we could do in retaliation, so may be it can have some slight deterrent effect – is now rather than after thousands and thousands more American casualties.⁴⁰

The BBC revealed that 'there has been a marked increase in racial incidence in Wales following the 11 September attacks, according to the Commission for Racial Equality. Speaking to the Welsh Assembly on Wednesday, the commission's Dr. Mushuq Ally said school bullying incidents had trebled and children – particularly members of the Muslim community – had been abused in the streets. Added to that, he said, nearly all the country's mosques had either been attacked or received abusive mail. ... In the 10 days immediately after the terrorist strikes in America, there were around 100 incidents within Swansea, Cardiff and Newport on the Muslim community.'⁴¹ Realising the intensity of the problem, in September 2001, in his statement, the British Home Office Minister John Denham said that the government will act to cut out the 'cancer of Islamophobia. He further stated that 'real Islam is a religion of peace, tolerance and understanding.'⁴²

Unfortunately, this is not only a post-9/11 situation; Islamophobia has been on the rise during the pre-9/11 period. According to a report entitled 'Accommodating Diversity' published in August 2001, the incidents of discrimination against American Muslims rose 15 percent during March 2000 – March 2001. The report quoted over 360 cases of violence, bias, discrimination and harassment of Muslims.⁴³ Similarly, in November 1997, the Commission on British Muslim and Islam published its report entitled *Islamophobia: A Challenge For Us All*. The Commission chaired by the Vice-Chancellor of University of Sussex, consisted of seventeen members out of which six were Muslims. In

⁴⁰ CAIR – The Council on American Islamic Relations, *Editor Suggests "Nuking Mecca"* <<http://www.cair-net.org/asp/article.asp?articleid=687&articletype=>>, 7 September 2002.

⁴¹ BBC, "Rise in Racist Attacks Reported", 1 November 2001.

⁴² BBC News, *Pledge to Wipe out Islamophobia* <http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/uk_politics/newsid_1570000/1570106.stm>, 29 September 2001.

⁴³ CAIR – Council on American-Islamic Relations, *Accommodating Diversity – The Status of Muslim Civil Rights in the United States 2001* <http://www.cair-net.org/civilrights/body_index.html>, 23 may 2002.

almost every sphere of life, the report clearly highlighted discrimination against Muslims as a religious group and not as an ethnic minority.⁴⁴ It also highlighted the point that various attempts to address the problem of racial discrimination in education were ridiculed in the mainstream media particularly by *The Sun* newspaper.⁴⁵ Such an unfortunate situation raises various questions. For example, in the words of Nusrat Khawaja:

Why can a nun be covered from head to toe and be respected for devoting herself to God but not a Muslim woman? She's 'oppressed' when she does that. Why can a Jew grow a beard and be described as practicing his faith but when a Muslim does that he's an extremist? When a western woman stays at home to look after the house and children she's is sacrificing herself and doing good for the house hold, but when a Muslim woman does so, she 'needs to be liberated.' What is that when a child dedicated himself to a subject, he has potential, when a child dedicated himself to Islam, he is hopeless? When a killer happens to be Christian, religion is not mentioned – such as IRA and Serb etc., but when a Muslim is charged with the crime, it's Islam that goes on trial. Why? But then again, why is it after all that Islam is still the fastest growing religion in the World?⁴⁶

The above views and arguments are also supported by the European Union Monitoring Centre's (EUMC) report on Islamophobia. EUMC reveals that in the post-9/11 era, the biggest rise in violent attacks had been noticed in Britain, Holland, Sweden and Denmark. Women wearing the hijab, the Muslim headscarf, had been insulted and even raped in a wave of attacks across the European Union. Furthermore, in various cities mosques were firebombed and windows of Muslim homes were smashed.⁴⁷ This was in spite of the fact that a famous British magazine argued that 'certainly, Islamic extremism is very rare in Britain. For example, out of some 1500 mosques, only two are known to be run

⁴⁴ The Commission on British Muslims and Islam, *Islamophobia: A Challenge For Us All*, London: The Runnymede Trust, November 1997. Also see: <<http://www.runnymedetrust.org/projects/islam/SUMMARY.PDF>>. It is noteworthy that the impartiality of this report cannot be considered beyond doubt. The report stresses the point that with regard to the Middle East situation, the Muslim community should be more tolerant toward Jewish community and thus they strongly condemn every action of violence against Jews. In 1994, the Trust also published a similar report on anti-Semitism (entitled: *A Very Light Sleeper*), however, no such advice were made to the Jewish community with regard to Palestinians or Muslims.

⁴⁵ The author of this paper personally remembers that immediately after the publishing this Report, *The Independent* published an article with the title 'In Defence of Islamophobia', written by a eminent journalist Polly Toynbee. The article reads: 'I am an Islamophobe and proud of it' (personal memo of the author).

⁴⁶ Nusrat Khawaja, "Ever Wonder Why?", *Impact International*, June 2001, p. 5.

⁴⁷ European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia, *Anti-Islamic Reaction within the European Union After the Recent Acts of Terror Against the USA: A Collection of the EUMC of Country Reports from RAXEN National Focus Point (NFP)* <<http://www.eumc.eu.int/publications/terror-report/index.htm>>, 24 May 2002.

by extremists. But many young Muslims have a sense of alienation, which could, if things go wrong, tip them towards violence.⁴⁸

Beyond Islamophobia: Muslims and Christians Worship Different Gods?

A further unfortunate situation associated with Islamophobia is that sometimes it adopts the shape of extreme hate where even a universal truth is totally misinterpreted. In October 2001, Rev. Franklin Graham, the president of a Christian charity of the United States, made disgraceful comments about Islam and that Muslims believe in a different God. According to *The New York Times*: ‘Mr Graham said Islam had attacked the United States on September 11. He said that Muslims worshiped a different God to Christians and that he believed Islam to be “a very evil and wicked religion”.’⁴⁹ Similar, insulting remarks about Islam were also used by a famous French writer Michel Houellebecq. In his words Islam is ‘the most stupid religion’ and the Quran is ‘badly written.’ While defending his views in a court, he further added: ‘There is no point in asking me general questions because I am always changing my mind.’⁵⁰ This type of thinking reflects the ignorance regarding Islam and the Muslim belief. Such views are also projected by the global media. Possibly for this reason when on the 11th September, three planes hit US buildings, Muslims were immediately branded terrorists and Islam a violent religion. However, on the 5th January 2002, when a 15-year old boy crashed his plane into the 42-story Bank of America Plaza in downtown Tampa, neither his ‘religion’ was mentioned nor he was called as ‘terrorist’. This was in spite of the fact that in his hand-written note left behind, he supported 11th September attacks and expressed his solidarity with Osama bin Laden.⁵¹ Karen Armstrong, a famous British journalist rejects this type of attitude. She argues that:

A century ago, Muslim intellectuals admired the west. Why did we lose their goodwill? ... [T]he Koran, the inspired scripture that he [Prophet Mohammad (*pbuh*)] brought to the Arabs, condemned aggressive warfare and permits only a warfare of self-defence. ... In the Islamic empire, Jews, Christians and Zoroastrians enjoyed religious freedom. This reflected the teaching of the Koran, which is a pluralistic scripture, affirmative of other traditions. Muslims are commanded by God to respect the “people of the book”, and reminded that they share the same beliefs and the same God. Mohammad had not intended to

⁴⁸ *The Economist*, “How Restive are Europe’s Muslims?”, 20 October 2001, p. 45.

⁴⁹ Gustav Niebuhr, “Muslim Groups Seek to Meet Billy Graham’s Son”, *The New York Times*, 20 November 2001 <<http://www.nytimes.com/2001/11/20/national/20GRAH.html?TodaySheallines>>, 20 November 2001.

⁵⁰ Paul Webster, “Calling Islam Stupid Lands Author in Court”, *Guardian* <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/international/story/0,3604,794047,00.html>>, 18 September 2002.

⁵¹ *Fox News*, “Police: 15-Year-Old Suicide Pilot Not a Terrorist” <<http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,42334,00.html>>, 7 January 2002.

find a new religion; he was simply bringing the old religion of the Jews and the Christians to the Arabs. Constantly the Koran explains that Mohammad has not come to cancel out the revelations brought by Adam, Abraham, Moses or Jesus. ... We should also remember that until 1492, Jews and Christians lived peacefully and productively together in Muslim Spain – coexistence that was impossible elsewhere in Europe. At the beginning of the 20th century, nearly every single Muslim intellectual was in love with the west, admired its modern society, and campaigned for democracy and constitutional government in their own countries. Instead of seeing the west as their enemy, they recognised it as compatible with their own traditions. We should ask ourselves why we have lost this goodwill.⁵²

Unfortunately, the voice of Karen Armstrong and of other likeminded people does not make a significant difference. In 2002, an Italian American journalist Oriana Fallaci wrote a book entitled *La rabbia e l'orgoglio* in which she made every attempt to defame over a billion Muslims of the World. In her book, her hatred of Muslims is described in *The Economist*. The magazine quotes her as: “[S]ons of Allah”, who “breed like rats” invade Europe to soil the piazzas and bridges of the author’s native Florence with their “shit and piss” (“God, they piss a long stream, these sons of Allah”), and where-ever they may be, from Morocco to Afghanistan, Kenya to Saudi Arabia – revere as a hero Osama bin Laden.⁵³ Needless to say, the book itself reflects the thinking of its author which is purely based on hate, prejudice and ignorance of Muslim history and culture. This argument is also supported by Rana Kabbani, a famous British historian. In her view: “The popularity of a virulent new book shows how deeply Islamophobia has taken root in western Europe. ... Had this book’s victims been anyone other than Muslims, it would not have been published, and certainly not by a self-respecting house. But Muslims are fair game now and to defame them en masse has become not only respectable, but highly profitable. The defamer has nothing to fear, as there are no laws to check such vitriolic prejudice.”⁵⁴ Kabbani is not wrong in her argument as politicians go even a step further. It was around the same period when the book was published, the Italian prime minister Berlusconi said that western civilisation was superior to Muslim civilisation.⁵⁵ In the Middle East, in October 2001, in the West Bank town of Hebron, Jewish settlers took-up arms to expel Muslims from the area. A 42-year old settler said: ‘We are doing what Sharon (prime minister) promised but failed to do: drive these sons of Arab whores from the Land of Israel. If he won’t get

⁵² Karen Armstrong, “The Curse of the Infidel”, *The Guardian*, 20 June 2002.

⁵³ *The Economist*, 29 June 2002, p. 88.

⁵⁴ Rana Kabbani, “Bible of Muslim Hater”, *Guardian*, 11 June 2002.

⁵⁵ Iqbal Akhund, “Fallacic Rantings”, *Dawn*, 28 July 2002 <<http://www.dawn.com/weekly/books/books6.htm>>, 28 July 2002.

rid of these Muslim filth, then we will.’⁵⁶ Similarly, a hard liner Indian Hindu leader advised his co-religious to kill at least one Muslim in his lifetime.⁵⁷ Does this type of prejudice help in promoting global peace?

Why is Islamophobia so Fashionable?

It can safely be argued that the culturally biased, Palestine-Israel dispute and dominance of the pro-Israel lobby in the United States as well as the lack of information about Muslim history and culture are the major reasons for widespread Islamophobia.⁵⁸ Needless to say that the massive and systematised propaganda campaign by the global media, and the weakness of Muslim institutions in general and Muslim media in particular, are the other major causes of this sorry state of affairs.⁵⁹ This situation is exacerbated by the fact that because of their own weak media and information technology, Muslim countries are totally dependent upon the Western world, not only to communicate with ‘them’ but also to communicate among themselves. The situation is now such that the power of the global media unleashed against the Muslim countries is posing an unprecedented danger to their stability, security and self-respect. To overcome this malaise, the Muslim World needs to take stock of this deteriorating situation and evolve measures for putting its own house in order. This situation demands a common strategy for the development and formation of a powerful media system specifically designed for the Muslim World. This will not only help to project the Muslim cause to the world but will also counter the misinformation being unleashed by a hostile global media. At present there are only two Islamic news agencies, i.e., International Islamic News Agency (IINA)⁶⁰ and the Islamic States Broadcasting Organisation (ISBO),⁶¹ both established by the OIC. The question remains as to what constitutes the output of these institutions.

⁵⁶ Jack Kelly, “Vigilant take-up Arms - Vow to Expel Muslim Filth”, *USA Today* <<http://www.C:\Documents%20%20Settings|All%20Users\Desktop\Vigilants%...>>, 5 October 2001.

⁵⁷ *The Milli Gazette*, vol. 3, No. 11 <<http://www.milligazette.com/Archive/01062002/0106200225.htm>>, 23 June 2002.

⁵⁸ See: E. Ghareeb, “A Renewed Look at the American Coverage of the Arab: Towards a Better Understanding”, in E. Ghareeb (ed.), *Split Vision, the Portrayal of Arabs in the American Media*, Washington, D.C., American Arab Affairs Council, 1983, pp. 157-194; Edward.W. Said, “The MESA Debate: The Scholars, the Media and the Middle East”, *Journal of Palestine Studies*, vol. 16-2, 1987, pp. 85-104; Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, *The Muslims of America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); Philip Lee, “Image of a Culture of War”, *Media Development*, vol. 4, 1991, pp. 12-15.

⁵⁹ Mohammad Ahmadullah Siddiqi, *Islam, Muslims and Media: Myths and Realities* (Chicago: NAAMPS Publications, 1997), p. 40.

⁶⁰ The International Islamic News Agency <<http://www.islamicnews.org>>, 20 September 2002.

⁶¹ The Islamic States Broadcasting Organisation <<http://www.isbo.org>>, 20 September 2002.

The IINA was established in 1970, and its main objectives were, to promote close relations and technical cooperation among the news agencies of member states, and to create an environment of better understanding among Muslim peoples of their common politico-economic and social problems. Due to a series of financial crises, the IINA failed to establish its own communication network and has had to sign a contract with a Rome-based company to broadcast its news through a high frequency radio transmitter. Unfortunately, these news broadcasts are not directly accessible to either the public or the news agencies of the member states. The ISBO was established in 1975, with similar objectives to the IINA. This agency does not broadcast but produces a limited number of radio programmes for its member states.⁶² In fact, the spectrum of activities of both these agencies is extremely limited and they have no impact on global opinion with relation to the Muslim World. This situation demands that urgent and concrete measures are required to establish a sound Muslim news agency and a network of allied institutions, particularly academic institutions.

Review and Reflection

The outcome of this discussion reflects that Islamophobia is a major obstacle in the promotion of interfaith understanding. Unfortunately, the global media is an important agent in developing and furthering this problem. The discussion also reflects that this problem is encouraged by a wrong approach of informal education adopted by the global media. Thus under the prevailing system, a totally wrong image of Islam and Muslims is being presented at global level. This approach deepens the division between the Muslim and the Western worlds and encourages a clash of civilisations. A careful consideration of this situation indicates that in this process, both the worlds are losers as the hostility and conflict between them is beneficial to none. Thus this path must be avoided and adequate measures taken to avoid the problems that would result. This author strongly believes that simultaneous and integrated efforts are required on two fronts, i.e., at global and *Ummatic* fronts. At global level, the governments of major technologically advanced countries have to realise that partial views and an imbalanced approach projected at global media is not of any help in promoting global peace. Various human and civil rights NGOs can also put pressure on their governments to bring about change in the prevailing situation. Here, the main emphasis should be on the promotion of interfaith harmony and developing mutual trust.

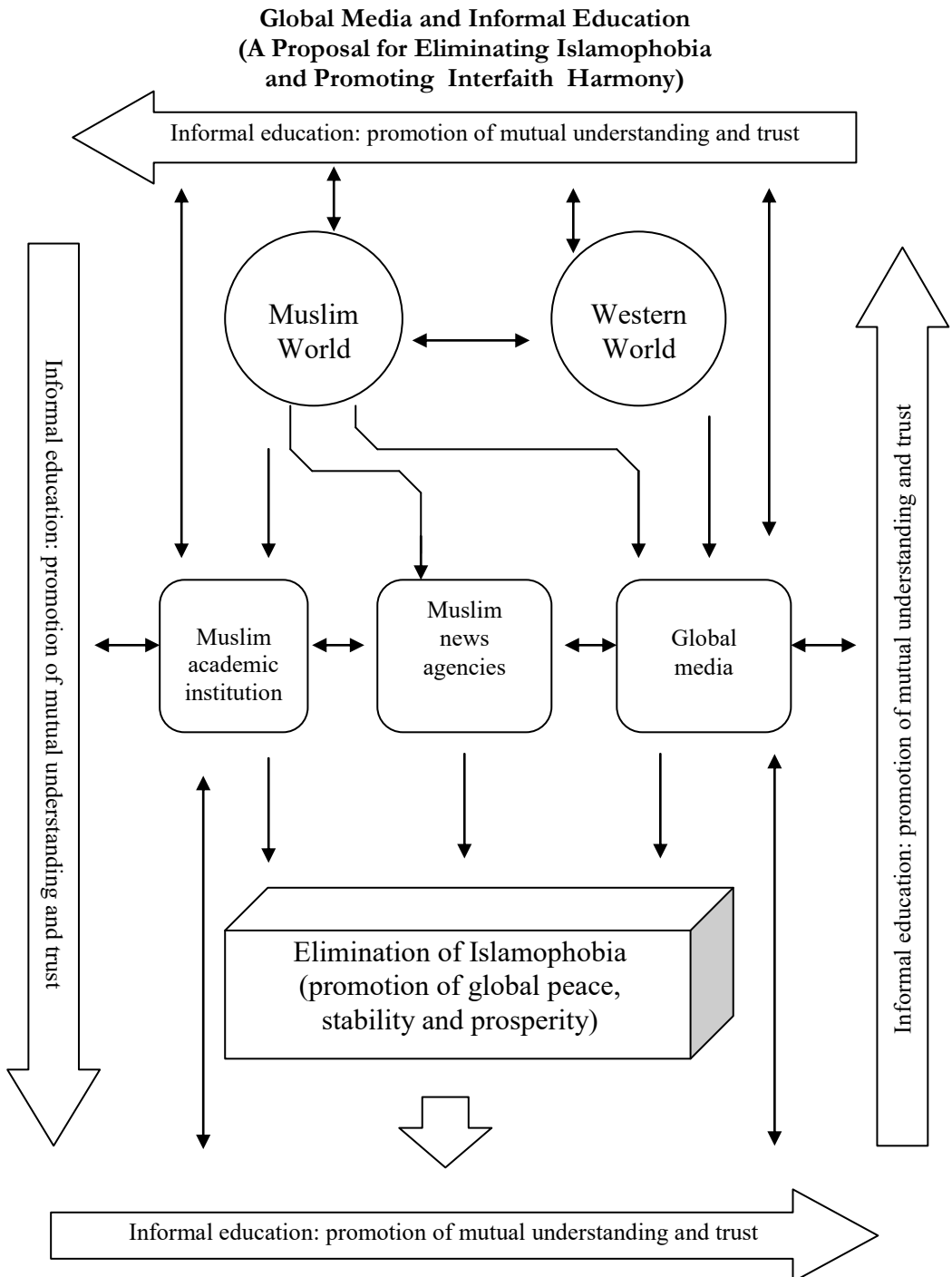
At *Ummatic* level, Muslim governments and Islamic academic institutions across the world should make maximum efforts to influence the global media. They must try their best to avoid confrontation with the West. They need to

⁶² Abdullah al Ahsan, *OIC: The Organisation of Islamic Conference*, Herndon: The International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1988, pp. 38-40.

evolve and reshape policies in a manner that promotes a spirit of mutual understanding and goodwill. This is a very challenging task but they have to accomplish it, as it is a question of their survival. The areas of convergence need to be emphasised and carefully worked-upon, whereas the areas of divergence need to be seriously looked into, in order to defuse tension. Needless to say, the Muslim World is lagging behind in every sphere of life, particularly in the field of science, technology and media. This is the outcome of its underdevelopment and that the Muslim World is totally dependent upon the major global players. This is one of the main reasons why Muslim countries have no voice and weightage in global affairs. It can be argued that to overcome this problem, there are various institutions working under the auspices of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference, e.g., IINA, ISBO and the Islamic Foundation for Science, Technology and Development. However, the real problem is that the weaknesses and the limited spectrum of the activities of these institutions have made them ineffective.

Muslim countries must have more than one well-established common news agency, not less than the level of the BBC, Voice of America or CNN. This institutional development requires the availability of satellites in space.⁶³ Some Muslim countries have gained the necessary technological skills in this area but are unable to launch a programme due to financial constraints. However, this hurdle can be removed by initiating joint ventures with the richer Muslim countries which do not possess such skills. The Muslim media must embark upon a campaign of truth to impress upon the world that the cause of peace in the world is achievable through cooperation and communication. This programme is essential if Muslims want to assume an important role in global affairs. Equally important is the strengthening of Muslim academic institutions all over the world. Their intra and inter activities should be linked with the Muslim and the global media. It can be hoped that such coordinated efforts would have a significant influence in shaping global opinion about prevailing issues. It can also be hoped that this approach would not only be an important instrument to curb Islamophobia but would also be an invaluable source of informal education for the global masses. Furthermore, these efforts will not only help to project the truth and a balanced approach, but would also be beneficial for the Western world to better understand the Muslim World. This suggestive approach can be illustrated by the following diagram. ■

⁶³ Syed, Fasahat H., "A Pragmatic Approach to Ensure Progress of the Muslim World", in Ghulam Sarwar (ed), *OIC: Contemporary Issues of the Muslim World* (Rawalpindi: Foundation for Research on International Environment National Development and Security, 1997), pp. 183-211.



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