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e-journal of International Relations

THE CONCEPTUALISATION OF ISLAMIC UNITY IN THE AGE OF NATION-STATES: THE MUSLIM WORLD, THE CALIPHATE, AND THE ORGANISATION OF ISLAMIC COOPERATION

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Abstract

The global expansion of Western hegemony in the 19th century and thereafter engendered profound crises in the Muslim World, as it did in every region that established relations with the West. This article evaluates the political, economic, and cultural unity efforts in the post-colonial Muslim World, focusing on the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). It analyses the structural and external factors characterising the contemporary situation of the Muslim World within the context of civilisational interaction. The central argument of this analysis is that an interconnected Muslim World has always existed, but that its efforts towards Ittihad-i Islam (Islamic Unity) through the OIC in the post-Caliphate era and the age of nation-states have been constrained by local and global limitations. However, it further suggests that these constraints do not constitute a historical block and that overcoming them remains possible within the context of Muslim populations.

Keywords

Muslim World, Caliph, OIC, Islamic Unity.

Resumo

A expansão global da hegemonia ocidental no século XIX e posteriormente gerou crises profundas no mundo muçulmano, assim como em todas as regiões que estabeleceram relações com o Ocidente. Este artigo avalia os esforços de unidade política, económica e cultural no mundo muçulmano pós-colonial, com foco na Organização da Cooperação Islâmica (OCI). Analisa os fatores estruturais e externos que caracterizam a situação contemporânea do mundo muçulmano no contexto da interação civilizacional. O argumento central desta análise é que sempre existiu um mundo muçulmano interligado, mas que os seus esforços em direção à Ittihad-i Islam (Unidade Islâmica) através da OIC na era pós-califado e na era dos Estados-nação foram limitados por restrições locais e globais. No entanto, sugere ainda que estas limitações não constituem um obstáculo histórico e que é possível superá-las no contexto das populações muçulmanas.

Palavras-chave

Mundo Muçulmano, Califa, OIC, Unidade Islâmica.

How to cite this article

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Introduction

The forms of social togetherness are subject to change and transformation throughout historical processes. This togetherness, which does not occur in absolute fixity, is shaped in relation to geography, history, and the socio-cultural context emerging from historical experience. Furthermore, the relationships that societies establish with those who are different contribute to and shape the social reality. While some influences can be evaluated as directly positive contributions, situations that push one towards a negative stance or position also represent contributions in the long run, albeit as a 'negative effect'. People, cultures, or, on a larger scale, civilisations constantly influence each other, contributing to the human experience. These mutual interactions and contributions become much more intensive and rapid during periods of increased transportation and communication. However, these effects do not yield the same outcome for all parties involved in the relationship. In some cases, one party tends to establish dominance over the other, imposing its influence as a unidirectional relationship, as exemplified by the global spread of Western hegemony in the 19th century and beyond (Wallerstein 1974). This article evaluates the political, economic, and cultural unity efforts in the post-colonial Muslim World, centring on the OIC. It analyses the structural and external factors characterising the contemporary situation of the Muslim World within the context of civilisational interaction. The core assertion of this analysis is that the efforts towards *Ittihad-i Islam* realised through the OIC in the post-Caliphate era and the age of nation-states are limited due to local and global constraints. Nevertheless, it proposes that these constraints are not a historical block and that it is plausible for Muslim peoples to overcome them.

In this context, in light of the foregoing, I will first problematise the notion of the 'Muslim World' and discuss its feasibility. This discussion is anchored in Cemil Aydın's work, *The Idea of the Muslim World*, which explores whether an 'Idea of the Muslim World' existed in the 119th-centurycontext. The debate over the Muslim World is important because it implies a political, economic, military, and cultural body beyond a mere geographical designation. I follow the trajectory of *The Idea of the Muslim World* in making this implication, but with one distinction: I argue that Aydın's fundamental claim occasionally

JANUS.NET, e-journal of International Relations
e-ISSN: 1647-7251
VOL. 16, Nº. 2, TD1
Thematic Dossier - *Emerging Powers In-between Global and Regional Organizations*
December 2025, pp. 469-491
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contains anachronistic and retrospective assumptions and that certain points he expected to exist but did not find, or claimed were non-existent but overlooked, should be interpreted differently. I contend that the reading I propose will render the 19th and 20th-century Muslim World more intelligible, thus making it easier to perceive the historical conditions and conceptualisations under which the expectation of a Caliphate became possible.

Following the examination of the conceptualisation of the Muslim World, I will address the Caliphate and its manifestations in historical experience during the early modern period. In doing so, I will attempt to distinguish the conceptualisation of the Caliphate in the post-Caliphate period from the practical experiences and the meaning ascribed to it. This will facilitate an easier analytical comprehension of the relationship between the late-colonial-era understanding of the Muslim World and its practical notion of the Caliphate.

After addressing the conceptualisation of the Muslim World and the issue of the Caliphate, I will examine the establishment of the contemporary global order in the absence of the Caliphate and the OIC as an outcome of the Muslim World-Caliphate conceptualisation within that order. In the conclusion, I will critically assess the effectiveness and strength of the OIC in its efforts to resolve both the internal problems and the external challenges of the Muslim World in the absence of the Caliphate, thus concluding the article.

The Muslim World

Approximately one-fifth of the world's population today is Muslim (Aydın 2017, p. 1). Muslims can be encountered in many parts of the world, from the Siberian deserts to the canyons of North America, from the Amazon in South America to the depths of Africa. When asked about their thoughts regarding other people who define themselves as Muslim, you may witness them expressing that they do not see them as separate from themselves and that they share a common bond. It is even possible to observe some discussing this perception of commonality with an ideal of universal and monolithic unity. In this context, it suffices to cite the examples of transnational aid associations/foundations and the many Muslims of different nationalities working as volunteers there, or Muslims who travel to conflict zones despite the danger of death to assist Muslims in those areas. However, can one speak of a unified entity encompassing the political, military, and cultural unity of all Muslims in historical experience? Or can one speak of a Muslim World—a shared destiny—bound by the collective past and future perceptions of Muslims? Cemil Aydın answers this question with a 'no' in his work, *The Idea of the Muslim World*, a product of intensely focused intellectual and historical effort (Aydın 2017).

Aydın, seeking an answer to the question 'What is the Muslim World?', offers a negative reply regarding the existence of such a world, citing the late-19th-century political choices motivated by anti-Westernism. However, upon careful examination of the arguments for this answer, it is evident that Aydın's readily given response fails in some respects to escape being anachronistic and retrospective. The arguments in question, which we will analyse in detail below, can be grouped under the following headings: i-

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Muslims do not represent a homogeneous sociality, ii- Muslims do not have a monolithic political unity, iii- the notion of the Muslim World was born out of the assumption of a monolithic Western image, iv- in the pre-modern era, the belief in unity and the concept of *Ummah* were practically absent among Muslim societies, v- the idea of the Muslim World emerged as a prescription for salvation under colonial domination, and finally vi- the pluralistic administrations of cosmopolitan rulers in Islamic history differed from the conceptualisation of the Muslim World. Each of these arguments represents assumptions that are addressed in different debates, especially by Islamist political or intellectual actors. These argumentative questions directed at actors who propose and demand transnational movements or ideals of political unity significantly influence the search for unity and the ability of Muslims to act collectively in the post-Caliphate era.

Aydın argues that Muslim societies do not represent a homogeneous sociality but rather a structure containing intense (ethnic, sectarian, dispositional, political, cultural) differences among themselves (pp. 9–10, pp. 24–25). He suggests that the term Muslim World is recent and that this changed with the 'new' meaning ascribed to the notion of the *Ummah* (pp. 12–13). Thus, according to him, the perception arose that homogeneity was desired among Muslims, or that a homogeneity had existed in the past; however, he states that such a homogeneity was absent historically, and therefore, the absence of homogeneity should be accepted as proof that the conceptualisation of unity was also non-existent. However, the judgment here is the manifestation of an anachronistic expectation. It is unrealistic to expect homogeneity from people living in pre-modern societies—that is, in traditional empires or dynastic states; rather, it is more reasonable to state that differences were central due to historical conditions and geographical and cultural structures. The matter of homogeneity among societies that emerged in the modern era—or the expectation thereof—has been made possible only up to a certain point, even with the nation-state's apparatuses for creating citizens, such as compulsory education, mandatory military service, and the state's monopoly over social and cultural epistemology. Given this, expecting social homogeneity or uniformity from people who lived in the early modern or pre-modern period means projecting the characteristic features of modern societies onto pre-modern societies, which makes it difficult to fully understand social formations that have not yet experienced modernity and have not reached the capacity to control societies with the apparatuses of the nation-state.

Furthermore, we must recall that the diversity Aydın mentions is tied to ethnic, historical, and geographical constraints. This diversity, conceptualised by the notion of '*Urf*' (customary law), implies different experiences at different times in the same geography, just as it allows for different interpretations in different geographies at the same historical moment. However, these differences pertaining to *Urf* are not valid in situations clearly stipulated by the explicit legal texts (*nass*) of the *Sharia*, which we can call the paradigmatic centre. In many critical matters, such as general public law, family law, inheritance law, and the law of war, commonality/similarity, not difference, is the case. The differences represented by the schools of jurisprudence (*madhhabs*) do not alter the relationships among Muslims or their responsibilities towards each other.

Aydın contends that Muslims lacked monolithic political unity in the pre-modern period, but that this ideal emerged after the 19th century with the conceptualisation of the 'Muslim World' (2017, p. 24). We stated above that Muslims are not homogeneous in the

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context of social traditions and cultural practices. The assertion that Muslims lacked political unity before the 19th century is used alongside cultural heterogeneity, and the lack of political unity is cited as an argument supporting it. However, the expectation that all Muslims should live under a single political structure is the result of a conceptualisation that emerged in the modern era. As we discuss below, the Caliphate did not signify a 'Muslim United State'. Technical possibilities, geographical constraints, and the minimum conditions necessary for the practical application of law structurally preclude all Muslims worldwide from living under a monolithic state roof. However, this does not mean that the idea of the *Ummah* did not refer to the unity of Muslims worldwide, detached from one another (Aydın 2017, p. 2). The concepts and responsibilities of *Walā* and *Barā* (loyalty and disavowal) define mutual rights and obligations among Muslims, even if there is not a monolithic and homogeneous Muslim World (Toorawa 2013, pp. 178–179; Rustow 2013, pp. 318–319). These rights that Muslims have over one another form a notion of common interest and common enemy, advising that all Muslims be viewed as a single body and that organs in need of help be supported by the others. For this reason, in the case of acts of worship such as *Jihad* or mutual aid among Muslims, the vibrant parts of the *Ummah* are mobilised. That is, the rights of Muslims over one another command them to help each other in times of crisis, and this is fulfilled as a religious obligation. And the fulfilment of this obligation occurred at different times long before the modern era (such as during the wars against the Crusades). The fact that Buddhists, Confucians, or adherents of different pagan religions did not require such brotherhood and mutual responsibility should not lead to the conclusion that the desire of the Muslim World to mobilise using technical capabilities in the 19th century was derivative or 'invented later'. This relationally emergent practice persists in most acts of worship (with an emphasis on being a congregation). The difference lies only in its greater visibility in discourse and practice with the advancement of instrumental capacity and communication/transportation capabilities.

Therefore, arguing that the belief in the unity of all Muslims before the nationalistic ideology and European colonialism racialised and separated them is a misconception (Aydın 2017, p. 16) fails to provide a satisfactory answer to the following question: If Muslims were already practically separate where unity did not exist, why would racialisation or categorisation into races generate a need for the ideal of unity among them? By what argument did the ideal of unity acquire a religious dimension? We can take this question to a more world-historical dimension and ask: Considering the conditions of the pre-modern era, which cultural basins or civilisation (s) put forward the ideal of unity? If these ideals exist, in what ways do they differ from modern practices of unity, or do they share similarities with modern ideals of unity? All these questions necessitate considering the historical and cultural context. When considering the historical and cultural context, we can state that the ideal of unity (being one) already existed among Muslims, but that political, geographical, technical, and factual conditions did not permit the practical realisation of unity as we assume today. There has never been a country whose borders encompassed all Muslims, neither in the pre-modern nor the modern era. However, with the designation *Daru'l-Islam* (the abode of Islam), Muslims could live as individuals with the same legal rights in every region where the *Sharia* was in force. Since the distinction between Muslim and non-Muslim was

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determined by the law of *dhimma* (protected non-Muslim subjects), non-Muslims paid the *jizya* (poll tax) and were deprived of some rights in the lands of *Daru'l-Islam*, while being Muslim represented having superior legal rights. The relations established with the status of Muslims living in other regions were determined by the actions of the actors in governing positions, while for ordinary Muslims, the attitude of the rulers towards other Muslims determined their legitimacy. If a ruler, despite having the power and authority, refused to help Muslims in other regions in need, it meant jeopardising their social legitimacy. Or, in other words, it meant jeopardising their political power over their subjects. This is because they would have created an opportunity for different actors aiming to share power to attack them with the accusation of 'not helping Muslims'. The argument of 'not helping Muslims' in the fatwas of deposition or in certain uprisings in the Ottoman Empire is supportive of this.

The notion of a monolithic West is considered necessary for the perception of a monolithic Muslim World. Indeed, according to Aydın, the perception of the Muslim World gained a different dimension in the context of the external threat of Western colonial activities, and therefore, this perception constructed a monolithic image of the West (2017, pp. 5–7). However, the point overlooked by this argument is that the definition of the Western World is not new. The Crusades in the pre-modern era, the religious motivation in the exploitation of the non-Western world during the early colonial period, the systematic genocide of Muslims and Jews in Andalusia, and similar actions created a Christian-based image of the West, and the West itself does not deny this. This approach, which transcended the Middle Ages and extended into the modern era, was also relevant when determining the fate of the 'Sick Man' Ottoman Empire during the time of the Concert of Europe, despite all its internal differences. The *Question Orientale* was the attempt to define this unity according to its internal balance. Therefore, to understand the military-political unity practices of the West before the 19th century—for example, the motivation (apart from some elites with economic aims) in the Crusades—we must accept the reality of a common Christian-Western identity and motivation. However, this is not the 'unity' that precedes the homogeneity understood today. Furthermore, it should also be stated that the people living in the lands targeted by this unity (Muslims or the Muslim World) constituted a different kind of unity in the eyes of the Crusaders.

The argument that the belief in unity and the concept of *Ummah* among Muslim societies emerged with modern technological developments like the train, telegraph, steamship, and printing press, and was practically absent before that, also contains a generalisation like the one above. Yes, of course, the speed and scale of social mobilisation increased greatly in the modern era; but when it comes to the Muslim World, factors such as relations among the *ulama* (scholars), long *Rihlas* (journeys for seeking knowledge) for education, the mobilisation of Sufi orders (*tariqas*) and dervishes, and the high-scale and rapid practice of trade have never interrupted relations among Muslims. Considering the geographical reach of the Halvetiyya, Tijaniyya, Naqshbandiyya, or Qadiriyya, we are taking the entire Muslim World into account. The diffusion of common knowledge and the shared conceptualisation of unity (which we mentioned above is implicit in mutual responsibilities) throughout the entire *Darulislam*, merely through the education received in politically and intellectually central cities such as Istanbul, Damascus, Cairo, or the *Haramayn*, and the subsequent spread of this knowledge via students, indicates that

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unity is an epistemological rather than a technological outcome. The influence of effective scholars, ascetics, and other actors in the central cities, through their students and followers, carried the conceptualisation of the *Ummah*/Muslim World to Muslims far from the centre (Kaya 2011, pp. 29–30). For example, the influence and capacity for mobilisation produced by a scholar who lived in the second half of the 1600s, throughout various regions of the Muslim World before the 19th century, was made possible through the 'ulama network' (Voll 1975, p. 36; Voll 1987, p. 69).

The character of unity among Muslim societies in the pre-modern era was predominantly epistemological, not political. The practical results of this unity are also rooted in the *Rihla*—the scholarly journey undertaken by the *ulama*—and the ease with which they could socialise and integrate into the ruling elites when travelling to different regions. Ibn Khaldun, a scholar born in Andalusia who moved to North Africa, could become a *Qadi* (judge) in Cairo, occupy a similar position in Damascus, and even be invited to be patronised by Timur (Ibn Khaldun 2007). The epistemological unity is what made Ibn Khaldun feel at home in these vastly distant regions, but because this unity was also accepted by the political elites, the *Ummah* conceptualisation constructed by epistemological unity had to be accepted by the political elites—willingly or under duress.

In light of the above, it can be argued that the term Muslim World and the idea of Muslim solidarity it encouraged, along with practical outcomes such as collective struggle against colonialism, were present even before the 19th century. However, the colonial experience after the 19th century caused the idea of solidarity to become widespread and impose more urgent results. For this reason, the ideal of Muslim unity (*Ittihad-i Islam*) was debated, and attempts were made to formulate political positions among Ottoman scholars and intellectuals before the Muslims of Egypt or India who lived under colonial exploitation (Özcan 1997). The idea that the term Muslim World originated from Muslims living under the domination of England, Holland, France, and Russia (Aydın 2017, p. 7) is historically a weak claim. Defining the demand for equal treatment from the aforementioned colonialists as a path to salvation against their colonial arrogance—which viewed Muslims as racialised, second-class, and backward people—disregards the sensitivities of what we call epistemological unity; nevertheless, it is an undeniable truth that the racist approaches of colonial arrogance encouraged the idea of the salvation of the *Ummah*. The Muslim perception of unity, their feeling of responsibility towards other Muslims, and their feeling of shared destiny with Muslims living in other parts of the world—in times of crisis—existed long before the 19th century. However, the exploitation that occurred in the 19th century and the political-military-economic weakness of the current Caliphate gave rise to new discourses. So, what kind of political practice did the Caliphate perform before the late 19th century? Why did colonial powers, despite extensive field research, fear the institution of the Caliphate and its potential to mobilise all Muslims during the debates concerning the Caliphate at the end of the 19th century? These and similar questions necessitate that we re-evaluate the Caliphate and briefly address the practical reality it constructed in the Muslim World on the eve of the modern era.

The Caliphate on the Eve of the Modern Era: What It Was, What It Should Have Been

The new political structures that emerged in Europe with modernisation, or rather, the new forms taken by the powers in Europe, changed the previous regimes' understanding of the political (Ertman 1997, 90–154). The French Revolution, which brought about this change institutionally and violently, invented the term *ancien régime* to designate the previous regime(s). Subsequently, as European hegemony spread to the non-Western world, the theoretical assumptions, practical outcomes, and institutions of the Western political understanding also permeated the non-Western world. Undoubtedly, the political transformation experience of the Muslim World was not exempt from this. While the political was being redefined in the modern era, the institutionalism and institutional relations of the past also changed, causing profound epistemological ruptures. In this context, the issue of the Caliphate/Khilāfah and the political unity of Muslims in Islamic political thought took on a new character. At the very least, the manner of its discussion changed, evolving into debates that emphasised different dimensions of the Caliph's personal qualities, legitimacy, or minimal necessity. While earlier discussions centered on the qualifications of the Caliph, the manner(s) of accession to power, and the mode of politics, the modern era saw new topics of discussion—such as the poor conditions of all Muslims, the reasons for the Muslim World's decline, prescriptions for salvation, the status of a structure binding all Muslims, and effective methods for combating colonialism—come to the fore in connection with the Caliphate.

The emergence of new discussion topics regarding the Caliphate did not sideline the fundamental necessities of its legitimacy. However, new solutions were proposed in the context of urgent needs and the political manoeuvres required to meet them. In fact, Muslims had previously experienced a similar difference in dimension during the debates on the legitimacy of the Caliphate. The issue of the conditions and status of the legitimate Caliph, as discussed in the classics of Islamic political thought such as al-Mawardi (1994), al-Juwayni (2016), and al-Ghazali, began to be discussed with a different dimension by Muslims who were experiencing a socio-political crisis due to the Mongol aggression. Ibn Taymiyyah's work, especially *al-Siyasatu'sh-shar'iyya* (Public Policy in Islamic Jurisprudence), focused on the fundamental purpose for which the political was constructed, in order to find practical and Islamic solutions to the practical problems of Muslims in a time of crisis: the implementation of the *Sharia*, the establishment of justice, and the entrustment of the political authority (*amana*) to those qualified (1999).

Since the Caliphate resided with the Ottomans at the time of the encounter with modern Europe in the late 19th century, it was essential to evaluate the unity of the Muslim World within the context of the Ottoman Caliphate. The recognition of the Ottoman Sultans' Caliphate by non-Muslim states occurred with the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca, signed after the 1768-1774 Ottoman-Russian War. This treaty marked the official registration and recognition of the Ottoman Caliphate by a non-Muslim state in international law. The Ottomans, who were forced to yield Crimea to the Russian sphere of influence (Shaw 2002, p. 65), had the clause emphasising that the Ottoman Sultan was the Caliph of all Muslims included in the treaty text in order to monitor the situation of Muslims in Crimea and to prevent the Crimean Khanate from causing a problem for the Caliphate center in

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the future. This was because, according to the agreement, the Crimean Khanate was to remain politically free, albeit as a formality. However, it was not difficult to predict what this freedom would entail. For this reason, the words of the Ottoman delegate Yenişehirli Osman Efendi during the agreement are telling: "The Sultan is the Caliph of all Sunni Muslims. If he does not exercise this [his Caliphate] over India, Bukhara, and Fez, whose rulers are Sunni, this is a deficiency arising from the great distance between them. Recognising the freedom of the Tatars will mean a severe blow to the office of the Caliphate" (Buzpınar 2016, p. 50). The emphasis here is important; for it both reminds that the Caliph is the Caliph of all Muslims and stresses that there is only one Caliph. This emphasis continued to increase from the 17th century onward. As Buzpınar also states, the emphasis placed by the Ottoman political elites and *ulama* on the singularity of the Caliphate from the 18th century until the beginning of the 20th century—and even until the abolition of the Caliphate—indicates a state of vigilance against the danger of more than one person claiming the Caliphate (Buzpınar 2016, p. 60). In this context, the critique of the Ottoman Caliphate by the Sultanate of Fez in the 16th century—which argued that the Caliph should be from the Quraysh tribe—evolved by the 18th century, forced by practical consequences, into accepting the Ottoman Sultan as the Caliph of all Muslims and encouraging aid to him (Buzpınar 2016, p. 61).

As an example of the Ottoman Sultans acting as the Caliph of all Muslims, one can look at the text of the friendship and trade agreement made with Spain in 1782, which emerged after three years of negotiations. Spain requested that the agreement contain a promise from the Ottoman Empire not to aid Spain's enemies, in return for Spain's promise not to aid Ottoman enemies (Beydilli 2001, pp. 166–167). However, this request was not accepted because some of Spain's potential enemies might be Muslim, i.e., Muslim corsairs from the Barbary States might be at war with Spain and ask for Ottoman aid. Furthermore, the Sultans of Fez might also be at war with Spain. In this situation, because the Ottoman Empire was both the center of the Caliphate and because it is an obligation (*fard*) for other Muslims to help any Muslim asking for help (the relationship of *Walā* and *Barā*), the Ottoman aid to the Sultan of Fez or the corsairs of the Barbary States would be a religious necessity (Ahmed Cevdet Pasha 1309, p. 193). For this reason, this request was not included in the agreement. Moreover, the agreement text stressed that aid would be given to a Muslim state in case of war with Spain. It might be argued that this positioning was self-assumed by the Ottoman Empire to protect its own influence. However, conversely, the fact that Muslims living in regions very far from the centre saw the Ottoman Empire in a similar position because of the Caliphate shows that the issue was not one-sided. For example, the Sultanates of Malabar and Mysore in India sending envoys to the capital in the second half of the 1770s to ask for help from the Sultan-Caliph can be cited as an example (Aydın 2017, pp. 14–15). However, some requests for help, unfortunately, could not be met due to the weakening of the Ottoman Sultan's practical power. Yet, the inability to meet these requests due to practical inadequacies cannot lead to the conclusion that the Ottoman Caliphate was disregarded by Muslims or that the Ottomans only considered their own strategic interests and did not care much about other Muslims (Aydın 2017, p. 15). For it was not only the Ottomans and the Muslims in distant lands in need of help who deemed the Caliphate connection important; England also sought help from the Caliph to stop the Indian Muslims who were

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obstructing their colonial activities in India, planning to use the office of the Caliphate to invite Muslims to obedience to the British (Özcan 1997, p. 17). However, when these demands were not met, they would start producing discourses questioning the legitimacy of the Ottoman Caliphate. The discourse emphasising that the Caliphate should be reserved for those from the Quraysh lineage in the Arab world was circulated in public discourse by the British.

Against the British discourses questioning the Ottoman Caliphate and asserting that the Caliphate should belong to the Arabs, the treatise written by Redhouse in 1877 is important because it summarises how the Caliphate was perceived and accepted in historical practice: "…gradually, but generally, has been acknowledged, accepted, and adopted by the whole Sunni Muslim world, from China to Algeria, from the frozen plains of Siberia to the tropical islands of Sumatra and Java, and the British colony of the Cape of Good Hope" (2002, p. 98). Redhouse's argumentation is a manifestation of factual reality. The Caliphate, after the four Rightly Guided Caliphs, partially evolved into a sultanate, weakened historically, and became completely symbolic during the Mongol invasions. This symbolisation had little effect beyond granting legitimacy to those holding practical power, while Ibn Taymiyyah shifted political legitimacy away from the existence or non-existence of a Caliph to whether Islamic *Sharia* was practically implemented and justice was established, as a solution. This is because the political crisis in the era he lived in was shaped by the absence of a strong Caliph, alongside the lack of any authority capable of managing most, if not all, Muslims in the Islamic world. In this situation, local sultanates and emirates emerged; Ibn Taymiyyah's action was to keep these emirates within the boundaries that protected the public interest (*maslahah*) of Muslims and to ensure they created a social reality where the Islamic faith could be practised. However, he did not discount the fact that actors whose power could exceed local boundaries would practically aspire to the Caliphate. Indeed, practical reality confirms this: actors (states) with the political and military power to protect the Muslim populace are favoured in the ordinary course of life and are naturally accepted as the Caliph. This is precisely how the Caliphate passed to the Ottomans. Yavuz Sultan Selim's conquest of Egypt and the subsequent bringing of the Abbasid Caliph al-Mutawakkil—who was symbolically under the protection of the Mamluks—to Istanbul was not for the transfer of the Caliphate to the Ottomans. Furthermore, al-Mutawakkil did not leave the Caliphate to the Ottomans in a 'handover' ceremony (Buzpınar 2004, 113–127). The Ottomans, who did not protect al-Mutawakkil after he lost the Mamluks' protection, kept him in the capital for a period and then allowed him to go to Cairo, and after his death, the Caliphate claims of those descending from the Abbasid lineage were not taken seriously. However, the fact that Muslims cannot live without a Caliph, or rather, the warning *hadiths* that those who die without obeying the Imam of the time will die a *Jahiliyyah* (Ignorance) death, necessitate a Caliph. This practical need, along with the Ottoman Sultans defining themselves as Caliphs starting with Suleiman the Magnificent, and other Muslims seeing the Ottomans as their protectors due to their power and protection, practically meant the transfer of the Caliphate to the Ottomans. However, the Caliph, being the leader of all Muslims, should not be taken to mean that he possesses the capacity to provide a solution to every problem at all times. The limits of the Caliph's practical power also define the limits of the internal unity and strength of the Muslim World. If the Caliph has sufficient political

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and military power, he is considered obligated to protect the rights of Muslims in any region; if he fails to fulfil this obligation, it is emphasised that he will be held accountable for neglecting his responsibilities both in this world and the hereafter. However, the Caliph's inability to assist a Muslim in situations where his political and military power is insufficient does not imply that the institution of the Caliphate is non-functional or merely symbolic.

The 20th Century: New World Order Debates[1] and Unity in the Muslim World

Understanding the global system that established the current political, economic, and cultural world is equivalent to grasping where and how the Muslim World is positioned within this system. The period between the abolition of the Caliphate in 1924 and World War II was an era during which the war-weary world sought to reconstruct its fractured orders, and populations grappled with the economic and agricultural crises of 1929. Following Europe's second initiation of a major power war and the creation of unimaginable catastrophic crises on its own soil, the year 1945 marked the re-establishment of peace. At this juncture, unlike the First World War, an idea of a global order began to be voiced by the victors. It is known that the post-war' World Order' discussions were tied to *Pax Americana*. However, where the issue crystallises in public academic debates indicates the presence of different approaches, modes of reading, and preferences. In this context, the political positions to which each evaluation is committed implicitly express their visions for the future while attempting to understand the present. So, in this regard, what is meant by the 'New World Order' designation in public academic debates? Moreover, can a genuine order, beyond what is actually meant, be spoken of in reality? If so, how should it be defined for us to know what kind of world awaits us in the future? In this context, we must first state that Socialist, Liberal, and Islamist public discourses have sometimes common and sometimes differing definitions of the New World Order due to their political preferences.

The New World Order for Socialists or Liberals

By Socialists or Liberals, I do not mean all socialist/liberal structures or individuals, but the ideal type of the socialist/liberal discourse that is dominant in public academic debates.

The alliance of the Western coalition led by the United States and the Soviets to defeat the Germans against Nazi expansionism necessitated the establishment of a balanced structure after 1945. Especially Europe's failure to re-establish the balance it had created within itself a century earlier (the Concert of Europe) after World War I, and the United

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[1] For a more extensive discussion on the dimension of the new world order concerning Muslims, see Kurğan, Erdal. 2025. 'Kolonyalizmden Postkolonyalizme: Orta Doğu, Göç ve Küresel Düzenin Yeni Hali' [From Colonialism to Postcolonialism: The Middle East, Migration, and the New State of the Global Order], in *Küresel Göç ve Türkiye* [Global Migration and Turkey], eds. Ersoy, İmre S., Aysan, Mehmet Fatih & Kurğan, Erdal, İstanbul: Marmara Üniversitesi Yayınları. The conceptual discussion presented here follows the same trajectory as the conceptual discussion in that article

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States' inability to collect the loan aid it had provided to the continent, paved the way for the process leading up to and after 1945. At the peace talks concluding World War I in 1918, France's stance and the price it sought to exact from Germany seemed to suggest a forthcoming rematch even at that time. J. M. Keynes, a member of the British delegation at the talks, emphasised that these were not peace talks but preparations for a new war. According to Keynes, the war reparations demanded by the French were an amount the Germans could not pay, and the peace terms were conditions they could not accept. Ultimately, Keynes's prediction proved correct, and World War II occurred.

After World War II, the US did not repeat the mistake it made in 1918: it did not leave the continent to its own devices; politically, militarily, and economically, it integrated the Western powers into the system it constructed. Symbolically, the Dollar-centric' International Monetary Agreement' was signed in 1944 based on the decision reached in Bretton Woods, a small town in New Hampshire, USA. Subsequently, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) were established. This was not merely economic cooperation but also a global political organisation that did not include the Soviets (and countries close to them). And in the newly constructed post-war economic order, modern liberal economic policies, which allowed for state regulation—the theoretical framework of which was provided by Keynes—became prevalent. In this post-war economic order, states prevented unemployment by creating jobs through massive public investments while also stimulating the market by encouraging consumption. At the same time, states provided essential social needs such as education, healthcare, and pensions through welfare state practices. In fact, these economic policies were implemented by Nazi Germany before 1945, but let us be content with this for now.

The crisis of the Bretton Woods system established in the post-1945 era, along with economic downturns such as the 1973 oil crisis, led to the economic policies first implemented by the coup administration in Chile in 1973, and subsequently by Margaret Thatcher in the UK and Ronald Reagan in the US in the late 70s and early 80s, which are generally referred to as the Neo-liberal order. This era, in which welfare state policies were abandoned, labour organisations were restricted, and public services such as education and healthcare were marketised, also reflects the period when the discourse of 'Globalisation' began to emerge and spread. It is an era characterised by the rise of identity politics, consequently bringing multiple identity issues to the agenda, questioning the boundaries and conventional policies of the nation-state, and the proliferation of cultural pluralism (Fülberth, 2018: 265–291). In this period, where organised structures—regardless of whether they are socialist or right-wing/nationalist—are defined as tools of domination, sociality and social organisations are changing, and processes are centred on identity politics.

In this 'New World Order' (Harvey, 2010; Hardt & Negri, 2023), which Socialists evaluate from a critical perspective and Liberals from an affirmative one, the *homo economicus* is unrestrained by any legal bond. The preceding legal and public benefit-centric restrictions of the *homo juridicus* are abandoned in the neo-liberal era, and the *homo juridicus* is translated into the language of the *homo economicus*. In other words, the law is constructed to serve the interests of capital; the state creates the market.

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To summarise, this order, which permitted the abandonment of the post-war order and the spread of globalisation and neo-liberal policies, is characterised by Socialists and Liberals as the New World Order.

The New World Order in Islamist Discourse

Unlike the Socialist or Liberal discourse, Islamist discourse differentiates itself by not seeking the New World Order in the language of political economy. In Islamist discourse, the New World Order begins in the early 90s when NATO positioned Islam in its new enemy concept (Albayrak, 2007: 45). Following the end of the Cold War, since the Soviets were dissolved, the destabilising power/actor needed for *Pax Americana's* legitimacy was now represented by Muslims.

The 'green belt' project, which centred on the Muslim world serving as a buffer against Soviet 'red' expansionism in the 1980s, began to be abandoned in the 90s. The Green Belt project actually did not operate with the efficiency expected by the US. The project, which presupposed an identity of 'Moderate Islam/Muslim' that was compatible with the liberal-capitalist values of modern Western civilisation, also included mass mobilisation to be leveraged against the socialist threat. However, the project failed to account for one thing: the procedural premises of Islam. That is, the epistemic sources of the monotheistic worldview not only rejected the liberal-capitalist values promoted by the US but also viewed them as falsehoods on the same scale as the socialist worldview. For this reason, for Islamists, the capitalist expansionism of the US was at least as dangerous as the communist expansionism of the Soviets. Consequently, mainstream Islamist structures remained distant from the green belt project, apart from narrow-framed, individual, or local involvements.

The collapse of the Soviets and the Green Belt project opened the door to a new world for Islamist discourse: the New World Order. The critical threshold of this order was NATO's declaration, in its 'New Strategic Concept', that it viewed Islamist fundamentalists as its existential enemy. In this context, the statement made by former NATO Secretary-General Willy Claes in February 1995 is very clear: '…in the five years since the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe, Islamic militancy has emerged as perhaps the gravest threat to the alliance and Western security.'[2] The notion that Islamism was the new enemy concept after the Soviets was articulated much earlier than Claes, in 1990 and also in the context of NATO, by Margaret Thatcher, the architect of neoliberal policies. As the 2000s approached, the rising discourse of 'Islamist terror' became a dominant rhetoric in the conventional press, and military interventions in different geographies of the Islamic world did not meet with sufficient reaction because they could find a legitimate basis in world public opinion.

Following the 9/11 attacks, the strategic concept surpassed the Atlantic and Continental Europe and spread globally. Every government, strong or weak, from the US to France, from Russia to China, from Uzbekistan to Angola or Niger, was able to proceed with the liquidation of Muslim opposition by labelling it with the rhetoric of

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[2]   https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1995/02/09/nato-seeks-talks-with-n-african-mideast-states-on-islamic-militants/cf728b91-d57d-4126-9e40-b77c9aa38763/ retrieved: 25.10.2025

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terror. Therefore, the definition of the New World Order in Islamist discourse can be read as the globalisation of anti-Islamism led by the West.

The Nature of the New Order

In fact, both the Socialist and Islamist definitions of the New World Order have justifiable aspects. However, my personal conviction is that the New Order has been in existence for a very long time and has created the entire international public sphere.

The point missed by the conventional understandings of the world order is its pro-Zionist structure—which supports Zionist interests under all circumstances—that remains unchanged, unlike the changing sides of the order, and gives the order its character. Bringing the philosophical and academic premises of this system to the fore is one of the indispensable prerequisites for understanding its nature. I claim that the influence of Zionism in the establishment of the UN, the declaration of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and so forth, cannot be denied.

The post-1945 order, *Pax Americana*, where the institutions known internationally today were built, never saw the Soviets as an existential other, contrary to Cold War rhetoric. They were already allies in pushing back the Nazis. The US-Soviet conflict experienced in the first years of the order until its institutions were established began to soften with *détente* , not long after—10-15 years later—and the order was consolidated with a mutually agreed-upon, controlled tension. The price for the US was the acceptance of the Soviets as a superpower. For this reason, the New World Order was consolidated on a global scale by including Soviet Russia and China, with absolute veto power, in the United Nations (UN), the symbolic institution of the post-'45 order.

The pro-Zionist character of the order is not solely the exclusion of the Germans as an atonement for their Nazi sins; it was also the recognition of Jews as a separate nation by the Allies (US, UK, France, USSR, and China). Our point is not that a Jewish identity or Judaism does not exist; of course, there is a reality called Jews and Judaism. However, the recognition of this entity as a 'nation' in the age of nation-states also presupposes a state and a homeland for that nation; if the state and homeland do not exist, it makes them necessary and legitimate.

The pro-Zionist character of the New World Order both legitimised and accelerated the process leading up to 1948. The realisation of a homeland for the stateless Jewish population would only be possible by evacuating the non-Jewish population from the region we define as Palestine, with Al-Haram Al-Sharif (the Noble Sanctuary) at its centre. The 'Transfer' discussions in the early 1940s, which envisioned moving the surplus population in Europe as colonisers to sparsely populated areas, were also on the agenda of US President Roosevelt (Mazower 2013, p. 108). The secret M-Project, or 'Migration Project,' prepared during the war, did not only aim to give the Jews a homeland. It also aimed to coordinate international agreements between European countries with a population surplus—the countries that would export population—and the countries where the population was projected to be settled (Mazower 2013, pp. 105–106). However, Roosevelt's project failed. Yet, the Jewish export part of the project continued in a complex manner. Demographers, geographers, and other cademics, such

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as Eugene Kulischer, Joseph Schechtman, and Vladimir Jabotinsky, each of whom was a Zionist or even an active Zionist, constructed the discourse in the post-'45 order that viewed the existence of Zionism as a state as the unique legitimacy of the order (Mazower 2013).

In addition to the pro-Zionist character of the New World Order, we must also remember that it is Eurocentric and colonialist. Among the things that remained unchanged on the path from colonialism to post-colonialism is the circulation of political, economic, military, and epistemic discourses—which recreate the domination of the system's hegemonic powers—in public debate spheres. This discursive struggle gave rise to its opponents; while the hegemonic discourse stood on one side, critical approaches emerged opposite it. Nevertheless, the Muslim World, in the post-Caliphate era, has been coded as the absolute other of the new order. The pro-Zionist nature of the order not only disregards the systematic genocide of the Israeli occupation regime but also tolerates movements of 'history-cide' that attack the historical past of Muslims. In this context, an arson attack was carried out against the Al-Aqsa Mosque in 1969 as one of the Zionist terror activities ongoing in the Palestinian territories since the 1890s. The unintended consequence of this action gained a new dimension with the construction of an institutional body by the Caliphate-less Muslim World, which they hoped would fulfil the Caliph's duties in practice.

OIC: Replacement of the Caliphate, Power Struggle, or Effort for Existence?

Al-Aqsa Mosque, one of the three holy sanctuaries of Muslims, was set on fire by a Jew on August 22, 1969. These 'civilian' attacks, seen as militia activities of the Zionist occupation regime and directed at the history of Jerusalem and the sacred sites of Muslims, were met with outrage across the entire Muslim World. The most significant and institutionally permanent of these reactions was the establishment of 'The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation' (OIC). With a decision taken at the Summit convened in Rabat on September 25, 1969 (12th Rajab 1389 Hijra), under the leadership of the then Saudi King Faisal and Moroccan King Hassan, it was decided to establish an international institution to which all Muslim countries would be members. Subsequently, at the first Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers (ICFM) held in Jeddah in 1970, agreement was reached on giving the organisation permanent status, making Jeddah the headquarters of the secretariat until Jerusalem was liberated, and appointing the former Prime Minister of Malaysia, Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj, as the founding Secretary-General.[3] At the 3rd ICFM Session held in March 1972, the Charter of the Islamic Conference was adopted, giving the organisation legal personality.

According to the organisation's founding Charter, the organs of the OIC are listed under 11 separate headings. These 11 headings express both the names of the core organs and the types of organs. Accordingly, the institutional structure of the OIC consists

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[3] The current Secretary-General, serving as the 12th in the post, is Hissein Brahim Taha, and the Organization has 57 member states. This number grants the OIC the distinction of being the international organization with the largest number of member states after the UN.

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of: 1. Islamic Summit, 2. Council of Foreign Ministers, 3. Standing Committees, 4. Executive Committee, 5. International Islamic Court of Justice, 6. Independent Permanent Human Rights Commission, 7. Committee of Permanent Representatives, 8. General Secretariat, 9. Subsidiary Organs, 10. Specialised Institutions, and 11. Affiliated Institutions. Among these organs, the Islamic Summit, the Council of Foreign Ministers, and the General Secretariat are the most effective (Ataman & Gökşen 2014, p. 12). The Islamic Summit, the main decision-making body, is composed of heads of government/state and kings. Meeting routinely every three years unless an extraordinary meeting is necessary, the Islamic Summit determines the basic policies to be followed by the organisation. Accepting the principle of discussing every issue related to the Muslim World, the organisation presents solutions to these issues and adopts resolutions regarding the organisation's common stance on these matters. A term president is elected at every ordinary meeting of the Islamic Summit held every three years; thus, the term presidencies are for three years. The arrangements required for the Islamic Summit meetings are carried out by the Council of Foreign Ministers and the General Secretariat.

The second-highest and effective decision-making body of the organisation is the Council of Foreign Ministers, which consists of the foreign ministers of the member states or their official representatives. Meeting once a year normally, the Council of Foreign Ministers can also hold extraordinary meetings upon the request of the General Secretariat or any member. It holds coordination meetings during the UN General Assembly to develop a common stance among member states; it determines the policies to be pursued and establishes common positions. The Council of Foreign Ministers, which meets in a different member state each year, ensures the implementation of decisions that determine the organisation's general policy and the review and monitoring of decisions taken at previous meetings of the Islamic Summit and the Council of Foreign Ministers. Key duties, such as the appointment of the Secretary-General and his assistants, the adoption of the organisation's budget, and the proposal of new organs or committees, are also under its purview.

The General Secretariat, the executive organ of the organisation, is responsible for ensuring dialogue among member states; controlling and reporting the implementation of the decisions and recommendations of the Islamic Summit and the Council of Foreign Ministers; and supporting the subsidiary or auxiliary organs and specialised institutions by guiding and coordinating their programs. The Secretary-General, the most effective executive of the organisation, can be elected by the Council of Foreign Ministers for a term of five years, for a maximum of two terms. The Secretary-General submits his assistants for the approval of the Council of Foreign Ministers and appoints the staff of the organisation. Employees of the General Secretariat do not receive orders or instructions from any government or authority outside the organisation while performing their duties. The subsidiary organs specified in the OIC Charter are: the Statistical, Economic and Social Research and Training Centre for Islamic Countries (SESRIC); the Research Centre for Islamic History, Art and Culture (IRCICA); the Islamic University of Technology (IUT); the Islamic Centre for Development of Trade (ICDT); the

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International Islamic Fiqh Academy (IIFA); and the Islamic Solidarity Fund and its Waqf (ISF).[4]

Within the OIC, there are four permanent committees, each operating under the patronage of the head of state of a different country. The relevant ministers of the member states attend the meetings of these committees. These committees are the Al-Quds Committee, the Standing Committee for Information and Cultural Affairs (COMIAC), the Standing Committee for Economic and Commercial Cooperation (COMCEC), and the Standing Committee for Scientific and Technological Cooperation (COMSTECH).

Among these committees, the one with the closest relationship to the organisation's founding motivation is the Al-Quds Committee. Established in Rabat in 1975, the main purpose of the Al-Quds Committee is to coordinate economic aid provided to Muslims in various cities of Palestine, especially Jerusalem. In addition, the committee determines the necessary measures to be taken for the protection of the sacred sites of Muslims in and around Jerusalem, particularly Al-Aqsa Mosque, and monitors the implementation of the required actions. The other committees were established with the intention of promoting the economic and social development of member countries and increasing their mutual relations in these areas. These committees are tasked with monitoring the implementation of OIC decisions concerning economic and commercial cooperation, enhancing the capacity of member states in these matters, and presenting recommendations. COMCEC has developed significant cooperation programs, working to foster collaboration among Muslim countries in almost all economic sectors, such as trade, industry, agriculture, food, transportation, communication, energy, finance, health, demography, and technical cooperation (Ataman 2006, p. 600).

In addition to the committees, there are also Specialised Institutions, each with its own independent budget, determined by independent legislative bodies. The specialised institutions established to date in this context are: the Islamic Development Bank (IDB); the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO); the Islamic Broadcasting Union (IBU); the International Islamic News Agency (IINA); the Islamic International Committee of the Red Crescent (ICIC); and the Centre for Science, Technology and Innovation (STIC).[5] The OIC also has other organs and institutions outside of these different categories. Among these, the Executive Committee, the Committee of Permanent Representatives, the International Court of Justice, the Independent Permanent Human Rights Commission, and the Islamic Universities should not be forgotten.

The main objective of the organisation is to achieve solidarity and cooperation among member states, and its other important goals can be listed as follows: i- To increase cooperation among member states in economic, social, cultural, scientific, and other vital fields, ii- To prevent and end colonial activities applied in Muslim countries, iii- To combat hunger, eradicate poverty, and ensure access to basic nutrition in every country, iv- To

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[4]"Subsidiary Organs," https://new.oic-oci.org/SitePages/OrganisationsEn.aspx?Item=9&OrgType=Subsidiary%20Organs retrieved 25.10.2025
[5]"Specialized Institutions" https://new.oic-oci.org/SitePages/OrganisationsEn.aspx?Item=11&OrgType=Specialized%20Institutions retrieved 25.10.2025

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establish peace by ending ethnic and religious conflicts existing in member states, and v- To ensure the protection of cities and structures considered sacred from a religious perspective (Kayaoğlu, 2015).

Considering all this and the successes or failures of the OIC in the Muslim World since its establishment, the resulting picture is as follows: the OIC is an Islamic Union attempted in the post-Caliphate era and the age of nation-states. It is even possible to suggest that the OIC is an endeavour for a contemporary Caliphate practice, considering the committees, auxiliary organs, etc., that we mentioned above. However, the purpose of establishing this union, the domestic political situations of the actors within the union, their positions in the international public sphere, the economic relationship networks of the member countries, and whether ordinary Muslims in the countries have a say in the administration—many such points determine both the capacity and the practical power of the union.

The Arab Cold War (Cleveland 2015, p. 360; Kerr 1971) that occurred during the OIC's establishment period—namely, some Arab countries being satellites of the capitalist Western world while others were pro-Soviet—significantly affected the founding process as a major handicap. Despite the heinous attack on the Al-Aqsa Mosque being the trigger for the establishment, the division among the Arab political elites made the liberation of Jerusalem a secondary issue. Furthermore, the Kemalist Islamophobia experienced in Turkey, the most influential power and the remnant of the Caliphate in the Muslim World, prevented the organisation from acquiring the experience necessary to draw a real institutional identity and roadmap. Turkey's decisive influence within the OIC and its ability to overcome its internal secularism syndrome only became possible in the early 2000s. Not only Turkey's but also the activities of other Muslim countries within the organisation could not (or cannot) perform at the same level, often turning into an arena for hegemonic struggle where some countries attempt to dominate. For instance, Saudi Arabia's desire to be decisive during the establishment phase was rooted in its rivalry with Egypt in the Arab world and its anxiety about losing leadership to Egypt. However, Egypt's distancing itself from the Soviets, its brief war with the Israeli occupation regime, and Iran's sectarian-motivated efforts to export the revolution after the Islamic Revolution compelled Saudi Arabia to approach Egypt again. Nevertheless, this approach did not significantly change the practical results.

Despite the OIC being established with the purpose of liberating Jerusalem, the political interests of the political elites of the member countries do not align with the OIC's agenda. The primary factor in this is undoubtedly the fact that we live in the age of nation-states. The concepts of *Ummah* and the Muslim World, as we discussed in the introduction, although they existed in the pre-modern era, the new circumstances created by the modern era provided technical possibilities that could make the *Ummah* and the Muslim World more dynamic and more monolithic. Paradoxically, however, a politically much weaker unity is practised in the Muslim World today than in the pre-modern era. This is primarily because national identities, national borders, and national interests are prioritised over the Muslim World. However, this prioritisation is not done by the Muslim populations but predominantly by the political elites. A regime-populace dichotomy exists in many states prevalent in the Muslim World. While the populations are mostly inclined to favour the Muslim World, the regimes—the political

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elites—adopt a position in the opposite direction. In addition to national division, sectarian differences can also be read as an obstacle to the ideal of unity. However, even though sectarian differences were present in the pre-modern era, they did not lead to a violent separation that would create a crisis within the *Ummah*. Even today, there are actors who fuel separation; however, these actors remain marginal, and the majority within the *Ummah* does not prioritise sectarian differences in times of crisis.

The OIC's performance in practically fulfilling the function of the Caliphate is weakened by the existence of other institutional unions and rival organisations. For example, the Arab League, established before the OIC (excluding Turkey, Pakistan, and Iran), was founded in 1945 by largely the same effective states in the OIC, with a similar objective of liberating Jerusalem. The oil-exporting countries among the 22 members of the organisation also influence the organisation's decisions. Furthermore, the D-8 union, the unions formed among African countries, the unions formed among Asian countries, etc., all restrict the practical power of the OIC and reduce its capacity to act.

Although the economic committees of the OIC work more efficiently compared to its political committees, they fail to produce the expected practical results. Since most OIC member countries produce almost nothing except natural resources and agriculture, achieving an autarkic economy does not seem possible for now. Both the poor quality of human capital and their dependence on the outside world in many areas compel the countries to act in their own interests. Consequently, these countries are often forced to accept the impositions of other non-member countries (Dabour, 2001). In addition to the political problems within the OIC, economic problems also hinder cooperation. The development gap among OIC member states prevents economic integration. Although the number of OIC member countries is 57, a total of 77.7% of exports are carried out by only 10 countries. This situation differentiates the economic priorities of the countries and thus prevents a common course of action. At the same time, this situation causes not all countries within the OIC to have an equal say (Sey 2020, p. 70).

In the recent period, especially after 9/11, the OIC has made efforts to generate public discourse in combating Islamophobia. In this context, it reports on rising anti-Islam sentiment in the Western world and combats Islamophobia under the rhetoric of human rights. Culturally, it can be argued that its recent work on minority rights (Sharqieh 2012) attempts to fulfil a duty similar to the Caliph's role of protecting all Muslims. Just as they raise the rights of the Thai Muslim minority, the Filipino Muslim minority, and the Rohingya Muslims, they also generate public awareness by raising the rights of Muslim minorities in the West. On the other hand, cultural activities such as supporting the restoration of historical artefacts that are the common heritage of the Muslim World (Mosques, Madrasas, Libraries, Palaces, bazaars, bridges, etc.), the preservation of manuscript collections, and studies on the history of Islamic science are prominent.

We argued above that a Caliph naturally emerged and gained acceptance among Muslims with social consent when political-military power could practically protect Muslims. A similar situation could have occurred after the establishment of the OIC. The existence of a military and political power capable of taking practical political decisions and putting them into effect could have produced a Caliph from within the OIC. However, it is evident that the committees established by the OIC, despite concerning many political, economic,

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e-ISSN: 1647-7251
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and cultural issues, were not formed militarily. Yet, the stabilisation of the Muslim World and its capacity to produce a Caliph are primarily dependent on military power. The realisation of *Ittihad-i Islam* necessitates a coordinated military power, even if not monolithic and unitary. Unfortunately, the practical experience of the OIC has been far from this. As the occupation of Jerusalem deepened day by day, it failed to constitute a practical obstacle, could not prevent the occupation of Afghanistan (by the Soviets and the US), could not stop the occupation of Iraq during the First and Second Gulf Wars, turned into a phantom during the Arab Spring, and remained overly silent on the path to the Syrian revolution, projecting an image of a cumbersome institutional structure. For this reason, as the former Secretary-General of the OIC stated, the Organisation has unfortunately failed to realise its own potential (İhsanoğlu 2012).

The characteristic structure of the post-Caliphate era constructed a political atmosphere that shaped the 20th century and determined the actors within the OIC's internal body: 'Unity in discourse, rivalry in action.' This atmosphere has always been decisive in the Arab League and the practical United Arab Republic (Cleveland 2015, pp. 348–350). This environment, defined by unity in discourse and rivalry in action, persisted within the OIC until the early decades of the 2000s.

Conclusion

The Muslim World represents a widely dispersed society on a global scale, accompanied by local diversities. In the 19th century, the development of transportation and communication technology and the colonial aggression directed against the Muslim World compelled Muslims to engage in an organised struggle against the colonial West. This compulsory struggle foregrounded the issue of *Walā and Barā'* (loyalty and disavowal), shaping relations and mutual responsibilities among Muslims.

In contrast to modern approaches that advocate for all Muslims to live as a monolithic whole under a single state umbrella, the conception of unity among Muslims also existed in the Muslim World during the pre-modern era. However, this unity was not a homogeneous uniformity constructed among the citizens of modern states; rather, it was an epistemological solidarity that was implicit in the differences centred on *Urf* (customary law). Political unity under the Caliph's symbolic and practical leadership could be constrained by limitations such as military capacity, economic power, or vast geographical distance. Nevertheless, after the 19th century, the political, military, and economic weakness of the Caliph left the Muslim World vulnerable to colonial aggression, and following the abolition of the Caliphate in 1924, the Muslim World was left Caliphate-less in the New World Order. In other words, it practically lost its unity and became confined within the national borders of nation-states. The OIC, constructed under these historical circumstances, embarked with the ideal of fulfilling the duties performed by the Caliph during the post-Caliphate era and establishing the unity of Muslims. However, the distance between the regimes—the political elites—and the populace in the Muslim World, the struggle for hegemony within the OIC's internal structure, and the prioritisation of members' national interests over the Muslim World all invalidate the Organisation's intention to substitute the Caliphate.

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Based on the experience practised by the OIC, we can assert that, despite the personal or national preferences of the political elites, the ideal of unity among Muslim populations still remains fresh. The emergence of quickly mobilised actors in the Muslim World during times of crisis is indicative of this. While nation-states prioritise their national and regional strategies, actors demonstrating a strong will—while being aware of this strategic *realpolitik* but also transcending it—can enact the practical outcomes of the Caliphate. This power and will are inherent in the socio-political structure of the Muslim populations, the Muslim World, or the *Ummah*.

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