THE ISLAMIC AWAKENNING: A STEP TOWAERS MUSLIM UNITY

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INTRODUCTION

Muslim unity is the most fearful reality to the anti-Muslims and the anti-Islamic forces. Today, the term Islamophobia is widely used in the literature to express the state of uneasiness towards Islam and its civilizational revivalism by the West. However, in this article, I will deliberately use the term anti-Muslims rather than Islamophobia as an attempt to criminalize the very feeling or the very expression of Islamophobia as it is the case with anti-Semitism

Last year, during the 24th Congress I wrote a paper entitled: "Moderation: an Alternative Epistemology for the Muslim crises". In that paper I diagnosed the Muslim crisesas the

crises of identity, and central to this identity crises is the absence of Muslim unity as enshrined in the concept of Ummah, one of the four Islamic constitutional principles designed by the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh[1]. When I was writing that paper Tunisians were at the beginning of their revolt against the totalitarian anti-Islamic dictator, Ben Ali. In that paper I was somehow pessimistic about the possibility of realization of Muslim unity in the foreseeable time.

I suggested in that paper a form of rapprochement between Iran and Turkey, two countries in the Middle East that, I believed, had already decided on their fate to maintain a strong Islamic identity. Most of other Arab Middle Eastern countries were yet to decide on their fate. Little did I know that before the end of the year the Middle Eastern spring would erupt like an angry volcano, that the more than a century disrespected, scared, oppressed exploited, deprived and marginalized peoples of the Middle East would have wrecked the wall of fear, and that some of the most brutal dictators would be reminded of a famous dictum of the second Caliph Omar B. Khattab when he addressed his governor Omar b. Ass in Egypt in the following words: " when did you start enslaving people and they were born from their mothers free"? This happened after an incident of humiliation and disrespect suffered by an Egyptian man in the hands of the son of the governor.

Human beings are born free, human rights and human freedom are divine gift, its origin is the right to choice (al-Amaanah)[2].So, right to freedom of thought, right to freedom of expression and right to freedom of religion has always been protected by Islam long before they were known to the West. The Qur'anic verse: "And say: the truth is from your Lord, then whosoever wills let him believe and whosoever wills let him disbelieve"[3], constitutes the first constitutive bill of rights. This verse is indicative of the fundamentality of the divine human freedom. Apart from this constitutive bill, any other bill of rights remains declaratory. In fact, in Islam, jihad in its pure sense is a war to eliminate fear and aggression and to defend such rights and freedoms

In his Muqaddimah[4], Ibn Khadun discusses the life span of states and their ups and downs.

Like human beings, Ibn Khaldun says, states are born, grow up, get aged and die. According to him, compared with people, the life span of states is the period of three generations. The conquest of fear through the concept of tribal solidarity ('Asabiyyah) is central in the Ibn Khaldun's philosophy. In his book Shrut al-Nahdhah Malik b. Nabi went further to discuss the life span of civilizations. Both of these writers have singled out good conduct, (akhlaaq) as the secret and basis behind the longevity of the life span of nations and civilizations. This is also expressed in a poem:

Indeed nations are but akhlaq (good manners) as they may persist

So the moment they lose
akhlaq, they will cease to exist

This rule is a general one but its generality has misled many people to think that the same rule is fully applicable to Islam and its civilization. However, every rule has an exception. In Islam, this rule applies only in relating the up trends of civilizations to akhlaq. However, the Islamic civilization is an exception to a large extent. Unlike many other systems and beliefs, being the only din, religion of Allah on earth, Islam and its civilization cannot die. The secret behind this is the fact that Islam is the only system built on a book assured to be protected till the end of the world. Allah says: "Verily We: it is We Who has sent down the dhkr(the Qur’an) and surely We will guard it"[5].

Unlike capitalism whose strengths emanate from the weaknesses of socialism, and unlike socialism whose strengths are built on the weaknesses of Capitalism, Islam and its civilization are built on the Qur’an, and a result, enjoys self-sufficient status. Islam is the first cell, it is the spirit that gives life to everything that moves, and it is the light that may dim but it cannot die. Consequently, the present Islamic awakening should not -be read in isolation with the history of Islamic revivalisms in different ages and its self sufficiency.

This article attempts to investigate the current Islamic awakening, the forces behind it, its relationship with Islamic the history of revivalisms especially the Iranian revolution, the threats and challenges that need to be overcome to realize a form of Muslim unity in a foreseeable future.

1-DEFINITION AND NATURE OF THE ISLAMIC AWAKENING

Today, Ben Ali is in exile, Mubarak is in custody facing trail, Ghaddafi is buried in an unknown location in the desert of Libya, Salih of Yemen has just relinquished power waiting for his fate, Basshar of Syria and the rulers of Bahrain are facing the power of the people. What is Islamic awakening? What is the real force behind these popular volcanoes? Is it proper to term the Arab spring as Islamic awakening?

The answer to these questions must interest the anthropologists and sociologist. In regard to the definition of Islamic awakening let me quote from Yusef al-Qaradaw. In his book: "Towards a Sound Awakening", he says:

"This awakening should aim at renovating the religion and promoting life. It should correct the misconceptions and should straighten the crooked paths, awaken the sleeping minds, stir the still lives, inject some soul in the still bodies and should re-instil in them, movement and development. Nowadays, thanks to Allah Almighty, we see signs of this awakening that were not apparent to many in the past.

We also thank Allah Almighty for the fact that the contribution of the scholars, the sacrifice of the martyrs, the words of the advocates, the efforts of the reformers, the hard work of the renovators did not all go in vain. These efforts were not, as some thought, a cry in a valley or a blow in ashes. They gave their fruit at the right time, by the will of God"[6].

In general terms, al-Qaradawi has attempted to lay down the elements of the Islamic awakening and some of the factors leading to it. Throughout history, there have always been Islamic revivalisms, Islamic reforms and some forms or the other of Islamic awakenings.

As for the second question, it would of course be difficult in a paper of such length to diagnose all the root causes behind the spring. It would equally not be academic to attribute the Arab spring to one single cause.

However, those who look for mere sociological factors may largely miss the real forces behind the phenomenon. Of course, many secular sociologists would wish and hope that the answer lies only in the economic difficulties of those peoples. I would acknowledge that such economic and social doctrines cannot be eliminated, given the very similar revolts taking place also in many Western countries.

However, when we investigate what all of these springs have in common, we will find that all of them are majority Muslim countries who have been totally deprived of their freedom to democratically decide on the fate of their leaders. I would however, argue that the real force behind the Arab spring is Islam. And here I do not talk of Islam as a narrow minded routine of rituals but Islam in its real sense of the word, Islam as a system of all excellent human values, an Islam, which is the only hope for human survival and an Islam, which is the last resort after the bankruptcy and the failure of all isms

It would sound awkward to relate the present Western grass root uprising to Islam. However, that will be so if Islam is thought of in its routine sense. But if Islam is thought of in its encompassing sense, the Western popular revolts can be read against this background. The doctrine of Ibn Khaldun and the above stated poem on Aklaq is also central here. In an interview on BBC on the 12th of December in FROST Program, Thomas Freidman, an American writer discussed his book: "That Used to be Us" in which he laments the decadence of five fundamental values as the main cause for American decline[7]. All such values boil down to the Islamic teachings. As I said in my introduction whether it is confessed or not Islam

remain the appeal of human nature when things turn ugly.

Even given its narrower sense, I still argue that the Arab spring is an Islamic awakening for the following reasons:

1-Islam and Islamic movements were the less favored by those systems than other movements. In Tunisia, as I was told by many Tunisians, one could freely show disloyalty to Islam but loyalty to Islam was becoming a crime. Mosques were being monitored, modest dressing frown at. The case was similar in Egypt and Libya in relation to Islamic movement

2- Most of the slogans raised during these revolutions are Islamic. Allahu Akbar "Allah Is the Great" has been raised all over the place and SUJUD, prostration to the ground in thank of Allah is repeatedly postured after every success.

3-Most of their meetings were called on Friday; a Friday of anger and Friday of solidarity are few of many slogans chanted during the spring

4-Almost all the movements are from states whose rulers used to support the American Zionist agenda in the Middle East. To understand this, I must remind my reader that for decades, and until recently with Turkish Islamic re-awakening, there were only two agendas or two projects or camps in the Middle East: the Zionist project supported by the most powerful countries of the West and the Iranian project opposed by the West. All other Middle Eastern rulers had no real projects of their own. They either followed the Zionist State, which most of them did what outraged their peoples or Iran. Recently, Turkey emerged with a third project.

5-lastly and most importantly, it is realized that in all successful revolutions, the Islamic parties emerged winners of the elections. In Tunisia, the Nahdhah Party is the winner, in Egypt, the Muslim Brother's Party followed by the Salafi Noor Party, and in Libya, although there is not yet an election, Mustapha Abdul Jalil's, the leader of NTC's

pronouncement about the supremacy of the Shari'ah is indicative of a strong Islamic presence

2-IS THE ARAB SPRING COOKED FROM ELSEWHER?

The popular revolution that was triggered by the incident of Bu Aziz has surprised many Muslims and none Muslims alike. On the surface, these dictatorial systems seem to have been very stable and lasting. They have been able to develop very powerful spy networks to spy on their peoples and very often in collaboration with the Western intelligence. So, given all these, the question that many people ask me is whether the revolutions are spontaneous or cooked as a new trap?

My answer is always that although there are now many under currents and hidden hands in play, my belief is that the spring began spontaneously with Allah's intervention.

I am of course very aware of the successes of the anti-American resistance camp in the Middle East and the failures and despair of the subservient pro-Western camp, something that seems to have suggested a dead end of the American hegemony in the Middle East by the time the Spring started. This reality made some people entertain the belief that it became strategic for the West to re-draw the rules of the game by compromising their puppets through causing the spring and re-designing the game in her favor.

This is a remote possibility. This is because these leaders and the pro-Western systems they developed were still doing a good job especially in eliminating Islamic movements, second, this idea may be rumored by the very cronies of these systems to instill fear and belief that the West knows everything and that they are always in total control of the game, and third, I do not think that to compromise its allies, the West would need to burn Bu Aziz to let that happen, fourth, and the most importantly, I have strong belief that Allah intervenes whenever He deems it necessary to save His religion

In my introduction, I mention the divine protection of dhkr, the Qur’an, as the secret

behind the Islamic resilience. In his series of sermons, Muhammadal- Ghazzali the late Egyptian scholar dedicated one of his sermons to the idea of Islam in the changing world. This writer further stresses: "The secret behind the self-sufficiency of Islam is that Islam is a religion and a civilization, which is based on free conviction rather than compulsion, both theory and practice have shown that it is a religion that exhibits its nature of peace and let the addressee to think freely. It always attracts the attention of the people of mind (Ulul Albaab) to its universal nature and natural appeal"[8].

During his prophecy, the Prophet received a lot of training from Allah, it is realized that respect for human rights and human freedom was one priority area of that training

It is on this basis that Islam spread across the world like a bush fire from its center in Medina. The claim from the anti-Muslims that Islam spread on the sword is refuted by the realities of the day. Today when there is no sword, and with all the Neoconservatives' plans, Islam remains the fastest growing religion in the world. This is the reality Sayyidina Omar was referring to in his address quoted above.

On the contrary to this nature, all anti-Muslim civilizations and movements, lacking the attributes of self-sufficiency have always been using force to exist and to subdue others especially Muslims. However, every time they think that they have a total control of Muslims and that Islam is died they are surprised by the re-birth of Islam and the awakening of its civilization. This is evident by the statement of one American orientalist Philip Huty who said: In the 12th century all the indications were signaling to the end of the religion of Muhammad, the crusaders were able to occupy the Palestine and entered Egypt and were on their way to the Arab Peninsular and the Moghuls were able to invade Iraq and the two jaws nearly met to consume the world of Islam[9]. However, with at the beginning of the 13th century, the opposite was the case and then the question was: Would there be anything that could withstand the religion of Muhammad?

This was so because Palestine was already re-claimed by Muslims, the invaders of Iraq

already entered to the fold of Islam willingly.

It is the same rule that applies now in the 21st century. In the middle and towards the end of 19th century all indications were signaling to the end of Islam. After the collapse of the former Soviet Union and the success of the Neoconservatives, the staunch anti –Muslims, in ruling America, there was great optimism on their part that by adopting the philosophy of Samuel Huntington of his book: the Clash of Civilization and by using the trick of 9/11and the so called war on terror they would finally subdue Islam. This optimism was consolidated by the following factors:

First, the anti-Muslims forces amongst Christians and Jews were able to already work out a deal to end the long history of Jewish- Christian enmity and started to cooperate against Islam, to perpetuate the existence of the Zionist state, which was established de facto in the heart of the world of Islam to further weaken the Muslim unity;

Second, the Muslim mindset was already possessed through a well-thought out secular system of education across all the world of Islam;

Third and most importantly, the grooming at head of almost all Muslim countries a well--trained and very loyal fifth battalion of puppets who have been doing the job of the anti Muslims than the enemies themselves. It has become a public fact that in countries like Egypt Tunisia and Libya, chambers were built to torture committed Muslims, and confessions were forced on them to be extradited to America

So, like the 12th century, these signals and other weaknesses in the world of Islam created false optimism for the forces of evil that the Islamic awakening was a remote dream.

However, the first surprise came in 1979. The Iranian Revolution was and will remain the unforgettable thorn in the throat of anti-Muslims. The revolution caught especially the Americans by surprise. They were so certain of their control of their puppet, the then Shah

of Iran, that any Islamic revolution was unforeseeable in Iran.

The eruption and the long survival of the Iranian Revolution in the midst of all conspiracies created a platform of hope and optimism for all genuine Muslims around the world. The Iranian Revolution represented the first blow that largely shattered the hopes and optimisms of all anti-Muslims around the world.

Another blow that came shortly before the current awakening in the Middle East is the success of the AK party in Turkey and the gradual elimination of the anti- Muslim secular forces there. In a new democracy like that of turkey, this means a deeper social Islamic awareness and revivalism, something truly disturbing to the West

It was because of this reality that I proposed in my paper last year more collaboration between Turkey and Iran as two countries already decided on their fate.

Little did I know then that the sad incident of Muhammad Bu Aziz, a poor Tunisian street vendor, who, like the majority of Tunisians, felt betrayed and oppressed by a puppet anti-Muslim system, would re- kindle the light of hope and optimism across the world of Islam

The covert and overt support by the West of the systems of Ben Ali, Husni Mubarak and many more undemocratic systems in the Middle East, contrary to the covert and overt antagonism of the same West against Iran and its democracy have exposed the hypocrisy and double standards of the West.

The facts of such supports on one hand and antagonism on the other have made it abundantly clear that slogans of democracy, human right and the rule of law as popularized by the West and its media is a mere rhetorical slogan. The real determining factor in the Western foreign policies lies elsewhere.

What many people have to realize, which is demonstrated by the Western attitude towards

other notions, is the fact that to the West, such values are only deserved by human beings, the Westerners, and not deserved by none- human, other races. The only determining factor in relation to other peoples is the Western national interest. And central to this interest is the defeat and the absence of Islam from the scene. This is the secret behind the support by the West of the anti-Islamic dictators and the antagonism of the pro- Islamic democrats

3- THREATS AND CHALLENGES TO BE OVERCOME

As outlined above, I have a strong conviction that Islam is the strongest force behind the Arab spring. However, with this conviction come some fears, which emanate from a number of threats and challenges faced by the spring. If the following challenges and threats are overcome the Islamic awakening will be successful and will ultimately lead to Muslim unity.

Before addressing some of the challenges and threats, let me confess that although being Arabs and having majority Muslim citizens is something these countries all have in common each one of them has a peculiarity, which makes their challenges and threats different.

Despite the fact that until the eruption of the spring all of them have been under a form or the other of American remote control neo-colonialism their colonial history was different: Tunisia was a former French colony, Libya was an Italian colony and Egypt was largely a British colony.

As far as their geo-economic and political nature is concerned Egypt is a front line state to the Zionist state and has a long history of subservience to America, apart from the recent attempt to improve its relationship with the West, Libya has always been perceived to be stubborn, and Tunisia has been less provocative both by its geographical location as well as its political history.

In case of economy, which is a very powerful determining factor, while Libya is sitting on

treasures of oil and gaze wells Egypt and Tunisia are less economically attractive.

This sample can run across the remaining states where the spring is being cracked down under the watch of the international community like in Syria, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia. So due to these specificities, the threats and challenges are also different. The following are few challenges.

1-Absence of a strategy and a clear vision

In order for the spring to become a successful Islamic revolution, the spring has to pass three stages: the stage of overthrowing the head, the stage of demolishing the system, the stage of instituting civil and service institutions and the gradual stage of creating a new Islamic awakening mindset. Apart from the Muslim brotherhood in Egypt, such a strategy and vision is absent.

2-Absence of Institutions

the second problem that the spring faces is the absence of institutions and institutional memory in such countries like Libya. The intensity of dictatorship was such that the despots like Gaddafi did not allow any form of institutional politics even if that would have been within the framework of their own philosophies. This has led to the absence of the institutional mindset and the prevalence of individualistic and family loyalties.

3-the presence of strong tide of the cronies of former systems

Today the Egyptian spring, which in the beginning seemed to have been smooth and nearly successful, is becoming complicated. The Egyptian spring is being slowly hijacked by the cronies of Mubarak under the protection of the army. Unlike the case of Tunisia and Libya, being in the front line to the Zionist State, for an Islamic awakening to succeed in Egypt, a long presence in the

scene by the revolutionist, as suggested by Ayatollah Khamenei bellow, becomes necessary.

4-the Western hidden hands

Muslim unity is the most fearful reality to the West. As a result, the doctrine of divide and rule has always been used by the secular West to further weaken the Muslims. Since the abolition of the caliphate by Kamal Attaturk, all attempts to reunite the Ummah under one leadership have been futile. Part of the grass root anger in the Arab world emanate from the subservient nature of the Muslim rulers to the divide and rule agenda. The Western hands are hidden not in the literal sense because their socio-economic and political control of such rulers is evident but hidden in the sense of hypocrisy, in the sense of preaching values they do not believe in in their relationship with “OTHERS”.

To explain that, let me mention here what the Americans call: “the Meridian House Doctrine”, the policy framework, which regulates the relationship between America and the world of Islam. In a speech delivered by the former American Ambassador to Malaysia, H.E Mr. Woolf, said: “allow me summarize it {the doctrine}, the cold war is not being replaced with a new competition between Islam and the West. Islamic fundamentalism is not the next “ism”[10]

Not only do Americans admire Islam as one of the world’s greatest religion, Islam is an important element of our own culture. The crusades have been over for a long time. Over four million Americans are followers of Islam, he added. The Meridian House Doctrine details three factors that underline US relations with Islamic nations: first, is diversity…, the second is interaction…, the third is our common aspirations”, he added.

So, what is expressed here is a relationship of equality and equity, and it may reflect what regulates American foreign policy with other Western countries. However, when it comes to the world of Islam what is actually driving the American Muslim relation is different. With the world of Islam, especially with the Arab world, the state of Israel and oil wells are

two determining factor in this relationship. The Israeli factor represents the religious dimension and the oil factor represents the economic dimension. So countries that are threat to Israel no matter how much democracy they display, they are perceived as extremist or -terrorist state, and if that couples with oil like in the case of Iraq and Iran, the Neo conservatives would use whatever means and excuses to invade that country in order to safe Israel and to control the source of oil

Given this reality the display of the Western hidden hand vary from one country to the other. In the Libyan case, because of the oil, the revolutionist must watch out to avoid all the tricks similar to those expressed in the Meridian House Doctrine. And in Egypt, the revolutionist must bear in mind that Egypt is front line state and the hidden hand may create chaotic state for civil war in the event the revolution show real sings of success.

To sum up the threats and challenges, let me quote from the Iranian spiritual leader Imam Ayatollah Khamenei, during the World Conference on Islamic awakening held in September 2011 in Tehran. Ayatollah discussed the Arab spring and pointed out some challenges and threats he felt the revolutionists must be mindful of:

“First, regarding the nature of the Arab uprisings, Ayatollah Khamenei says, “I believe that the most important factor in these revolutions has been the people’s substantial and pervasive presence on the scene of combat and jihad.” Some of the main principles of those movements are “restoring national glory and dignity,” “achieving psychological security, justice and prosperity under the banner of the Islamic Shariah,” “campaigning against the occupying Zionist regime” and “resisting the influence and hegemony of the United States and Europe” -- or the foreign powers that “have no right to claim a share in the victory of the revolutions[11].”

Here Ayatollah Khamenei recalls the similar experience the Islamic Revolution in Iran passed through. By stressing that the main factor of these revolutions’ identity is the “popular movement,” he simply reiterates a sentence that Imam Khomeini said a few decades ago, one

that has nowadays become a slogan written on many walls in Teheran: “Today is the time that nations take action.” Under “sharing in the victory” he alludes to the US, France and Britain, who supported dictators, but then wooed rebels after becoming sure they were winning in Cairo, Tunisia, Tripoli and elsewhere.

Second, Khamenei sees threats and dangers to the Arab revolutions “in our weakness and the ones that are directly planned by our enemies.” “Being afraid of the apparent might of the arrogant powers, of the US and other interventionist powers,” is also a threat that should be avoided. The first danger is “that we revel in the feeling of victory” and “fear the apparent might of the arrogant powers.” The first “potential threat,” he stresses, “is [to see] elements that show [a] commitment to the US and the West come to power.” If other Western tactics fail, “they will resort to methods like creating chaos, inciting terrorism and civil war between [the] followers of various religions, tribes and parties, and even provoking war between neighboring countries and nations.”

Translated into news coming from the terrain, it might mean that Arabs should learn from Iran how to avoid being afraid of the US and the West in spite of their might. Libyans should not celebrate before the job is done. Egyptians should not allow a new Mubarak to arise from their revolution. Syria is primarily seen as open to inspiring “chaos and civil war,” and conspiracy theorists are already involving Turkey and Syria in a military conflict. “I advise people to stay on the scene…and know that God is always helpful[12]”

CONCLUSION

This sum up of challenges and threats expressed by Ayatollah leads me to also sum ups the most pivotal elements of the philosophy and strategy towards Muslim unity and that is first, the necessity of conquest of fear. Fear is the best weapon used by the Satan and it is at the same time, the worst enemy for those who fight for real independence and genuine freedom. Allah says: It is only Satan that suggest to you the fear of his awliya’, so fear them not, but fear me if you are true believers[13] (supporters and friends)

What the Arab spring has finally been able to achieve is to tear up the wall of fear for the brutal dictators and their terror machinery, it remains for them now to substitute it with the fear of Allah alone. However, to conquer the external fear, the revolutionists should look up to Iran as a role model to eliminate fear and to learn the way Iran has been able to overcome years of intensive economic and psychological war fare staged against it.

It is after the conquest of fear that the second element, which is the acquisition of dignity, can then be eventually realized.

It was on these two elements that the Prophet built the Muslim unity through two phases of his life in Mecca, conquest of fear of other than Allah, and in Medina after Hijrah, the institutionalization of dignity (hizzah)

The borders between Libya, Egypt and Tunisia and many other countries in Arab and Islamic world are mere colonial and artificialized borders created by the doctrine of divide and rule and perpetuated by the puppet dictators. In the event of success of the Islamic awakening nothing can stop them from eliminating such borders. There are already signs to that effect between Libya and Tunisia and between Egypt and Gaza.

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The Qur’an, Ali Imran: 175

[1]-The Prophet built the Islamic unity on four constitutional principles: the principle of Shura, the principle of bay'ah, the principle of Ummah and the principle of Khilaafah

[2]-Allah says in the Qur’an: truly, we did offer al-amaanah (the ability to choose) to the heavens and the earth and the mountains but they decline to bear it and were afraid of it but man bore it. Verily, he was unjust to himself and ignorant. Al-Ahzab: 72

[3]-The Qur;an, Surah al-Kahf: 29

[4]-Ibn Khaldun, Muqaddimah, (Cairo: Daru Sharq, 1985,) p.70

[5]-The Qur'an, Surah al-Hijr, 15: 9

[6]-Yusuf al-Qaradawi, Towards a Sound Awakening, www.witness-pioneer.org/vil/books/Qawake/index.htm

7-These values are: education, research, welcoming others and supremacy of the rule of law

[8]-Muhammad al-Ghazzali, Khutabu al-Shaykh Muhammad al-Ghazzali fi Shu uuniddiny wal hayat, (Qairo: Darul I'itisaam, 1410 HA) p.10

9-Ibid

[10]- Wolf, "An American Foreign Policy: the Meridian House Doctrine" in Institute of Islamic Understanding Malaysia edited by Abdul Monir Yaacob and Ahmad Faiz Abdul Rahman,(Kuala Lumpur: IKIM, 1994) p.2

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[12]-Ibid.

10- The Qur'an, Ali Imran: 175