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Q: Contemporary Challenges to Muslim Ummah and their Solutions according to the teaching of Islam.

### Introduction:

The term Ummah is taken from the Arabic root word 'ammr' which means to aim at. Basically, Ummah is the community of believers who have faith on the oneness of Allah and consider the Holy Prophet PBOH as their last prophet and follow the Islamic code of conduct in daily life. Allah has endowed the Ummah with numerous resources, however, there are many contemporary challenges which the Ummah, 57 countries, are facing. These problems are of two types: internal challenges and external challenges. The solution of these challenges are clearly laid down in the teaching of Islam which should be applied collectively by the Muslim Ummah to save itself from such challenges.

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### - Literal meaning of Ummah:

The term Ummah is derived from the word 'amra' (literary) which means 'to aim at' or 'to intend to'. So, ordinarily, it means the people who intend to follow a leader or a religion.

### - Conventional Meaning:

The term Ummah denotes the religious community of believers. The term Ummah appears sixty times in the Quran with diverse meanings ranging from the followers of holy prophet Muhammad (PBOH) or of a divine plan of salvation to a religious group, a small group, or misguided people. It symbolize and embody the very notion of an Islamic community with sociological and religious connotations. Ummah as a community of believers entails a consciousness of belonging to a community whose membership was open equally and without any qualification or restriction, except that of faith. In the sense it embodied the universalism of Islam. For Pan-Islamists, the Muslim Ummah is a transnational geographical entity with its heart lying in the modern Arabic middle East.

The notion of Ummah is an integral part of religious, political

and ideological discourses on Islam. The concept of brotherhood and equality are the basis of the concept of Ummah in Islam. It accommodates cultural diversity. The Ummah did not abolish tribal identity; it only changed the hierarchy of an individual's identities in society. In essence the tribal identity of the individual was of secondary importance to an Ummah identity. Moreover, notion of Ummah is an integral part of religious, political and ideological discourse in Islam. Ummah is a framework for maintaining the religious unity and accommodation of the cultural diversity of the believers. It generates a strong sense of unity. So there is a consensus among Muslim scholars that Ummah refers to a spiritual, non-territorial community distinguished by the shared beliefs of its members.

### → Holy Quran and Ummah:

"You are the best community that has been raised up for mankind; you enjoin what is right and forbid the wrong and believe in Allah."

(Al-Furqan)

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"All believers are but brothers, therefore seek reconciliation between you two brothers, and fear Allah, so that you may be blessed with mercy."  
(Al-Hujurat 49:10)

"And hold fast, all together, by the rope which Allah (stretches out for you), and be not divided among yourselves"  
Al-Imran

### Hadith and Ummah:

"You will not enter paradise until you believe and you will not believe until you love one another."

"You will not be a believer until you love for your brother what you love for yourself."

"Indeed there is no excellence for an Arab over a non-Arab, nor a non-Arab over an Arab, nor a white person over a black one, nor a black person over a white one, except through taqwa."



## Objectives of the Muslim Ummah:

- To establish a just system on the earth.
- To spread the word of Islam
- To establish spiritual contentment through prayers, social justice, enjoining good and by forbidding evil.

"Those who, should we establish them in the lands, will keep up prayers and pay the poor-rate and enjoin good and forbid evil; and Allah is the end of affairs."

Al-Hajj (22:41)

"O you who believe stand up as a witness for Allah in all fairness, and do not let the hatred of people deviate you from justice (adl). Be just, this is closest to piety."

Al-Ma'idah.

## Resources of Ummah:

The Ummah, the supra-national political community of Islam, established by the prophet Muhammad (PBUH) 1442 years ago is endowed with countless blessings and resources to satisfy their material as well as spiritual needs.

For spiritual needs Allah provided the Muslims with the holy Quran, the Sunnah, a centre in form of Kaaba, the sacred premises of the Prophet's (PBUH) Mosque and the Green Dome.

Moreover, Allah endowed the Muslims with numerous, unending resources so that their needs may also be fulfilled. As of now, there are 57 Muslim countries on the globe and among them, Pakistan is a nuclear power. The Muslims account for about the 21% of the world's total population (1.5 billion or one fifth). This is one third of the total membership of the United Nations. They rule over an area of more than 90 million square miles; they possess 69% of the world's total oil resources; and they also own the abundant natural gas reserves, huge coal reserves (World's 7th largest coal reserves are located at Thar, Sindh), and other mineral deposits.

It also has immense potential in human resources/manpower. Muslim countries, by the grace of Allah Almighty, possess this rich source of development. However, there is a dire need to effectively and prudently channel this manpower to make the most of it & China.

Muslim Ummah also has geopolitical resources, four most important strategic international highways - the Strait of Malacca, the Gulf of Bosphorus, Suez Canal and the Strait of Hormuz - form part of its areas. Moreover, the Muslim world has huge resources as far as agriculture is concerned. The Indus River Valley in Pakistan, the Ganges Valley in Bangladesh, the Nile River in Sudan and Egypt and the coastal areas of the Caspian Sea are known as the biggest producers of agricultural products across the globe. Almost all kinds of wheat, rice, corn, sugarcane, jute, tea, ~~etc~~ millet, barley, tobacco, rubber, spices and fruits are grown in the Muslim world in abundance.

Muslim countries also have huge industrial complex. Muslim countries not only are self-sufficient raw materials, they are also producing a lot of

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goods to be exported to the other countries. These includes textiles, products made of rubber, jade, iron & tobacco, fertilizers, agricultural tools and machinery, dairy products, leather products, medicines, utensils and cutlery, surgical instruments, sports goods, paper and weapons and ordnance.

However, in spite of its political and economic importance, the Islamic Ummah is divided and set against itself. It is underdeveloped and backward.





## Contemporary challenges to Muslim Ummah:

Muslim Ummah is currently facing a number of internal and external challenges.

### Internal Challenges:

#### (1) Intellectual Crisis and Stagnation:

The looming challenge for the Muslim world is not religious, but intellectual. At present, Islamic Ummah is in the doldrums because of its intellectual stagnation brought about by political, social and cultural conditions generated by colonialism, neo-colonialism, authoritarianism and economic underdevelopment, and poor governance. This stagnation is most dramatically manifested in the scientific and technological backwardness of the Muslim world.

The Ummah has not been able to build a consensus on whether, in nature, the political system of Islam is Khilafat, democracy or something else. Which method is the most appropriate to elect the ruler? What is the status of Islamic banking? What is Islam's economic system? etc.

Several factors account for these intellectual conditions. The meager resources allocation by Muslim countries to research

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and development, prevailing cultural and political practices and, poor governance. Religious fundamentalist movements are some reasons behind such degeneration of thinking. Moreover, a robust civil society, promoting academic excellence, strategies to arrest the decline of the institutions of higher learning are some measures needed at this moment.

## (2) Modernization and Ummah:

Due to modernization of the muslim world there is a struggle between 'hybridity' and 'authenticity'. This, perhaps, constitutes the most important challenge of globalization for the muslim Ummah and is one of the underlying causes of the emergence of Islamic fundamentalist movements. However, consistently

## (3) Political Disunity:

Another integral challenge that muslim world is plagued with is disunity. The mission of the prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was to bring peace and unity to the feuding tribes of the pre-Islamic days. However, after his demise the Arabs returned to their warring ways. Blindly tribal loyalties returned. The leadership of the muslim

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Ummah after the death of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) eventually led to the most serious and dangerous schism among Muslims; the most lethal is Sectarian divide among the Sunnis and Shias.

### (4) Sectarianism:

Certainly, the quarrel between Muslim sects and nations are obviously contrary to the teachings of Islam. Islam and the Muslim world today are divided and in disarray. Muslim world is being consumed by unprecedented sectarianism nowadays. Personal quarrels and ambitions for power struggle prevalent in Muslim world, disrupt government administration, leaving it incapable of addressing the needs of the people. As a result, Muslim nations remain largely underdeveloped, poor, unskilled, uneducated and incapable of contributing positively towards the well-being of the Muslims.

### (5) Rich in Resources but Poor in Management:

Though many Muslim countries are blessed with rich resources, yet they are unable to put such resources to the optimal use, to serve and defend Islam and Muslims against those who conspire against

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the Muslims. The rich Arab countries are plagued by unchecked lavishness, extravagance and profligate expenditures squandering the invaluable resources. Their spending in education, science and social sector development is negligible.

## (b) Fundamentalism and rise of Extremism:

Fundamentalism is one of the most abused word. Most of the time, it is associated with extremism. Nowadays, the people who are usually described as fundamentalists are far away from following of the Islamic teachings.

Muslim countries are increasingly coming under intense pressure from religious fundamentalist movements to impose epistemologies compatible with their versions of Islamic doctrines that are generally hostile to critical rational thought.

## (c) Prevalence of unbridled materialism and moral decline.

Islam stresses a balance between materialism and spiritualism, between life in this world and hereafter. The loss of the spiritual values in the modern Muslim societies has resulted in unbridled

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materialism. Once Jamal al-Din al-Afghani the founder of Pan-Islamism, once said:  
 "The Muslims have lost their courage, their ambitions asleep, their heart dying, but the only thing that is prevalent among them is the lust and indulgence."

### (8) Lagging Behind in Scientific Advancement:

Lack of a culture of research and enquiry and indifference to modern education are the key challenges facing Muslim world today. Despite the fact that faith proclaimed in the Quran was meant to establish a culture of learning and education. For technological, military and IT requirements the Muslim world is dependent on the US, China, Germany, Japan etc. The literacy in terms of quality and quantity is dismal.

### (9) Law and Order Issues:

At present, the whole Muslim Ummah in general, and Pakistan in particular, is tangled in an intricate web of Law and order issues. There is no ~~light~~ letup in heinous and barbaric acts like killing the innocent people, robberies, thefts, terrorism, bomb blasts and violence against women.

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## (10) Poverty and Unemployment:

Majority of the Muslim States, save some oil-rich countries, are witnessing an acute economic crisis. These countries are facing an unprecedented poverty and unemployment along with the rise in the number of people who commit suicides.

## (11) Deprivation from personal freedom:

In the perspective of human rights too, the Muslim States cannot be ranked higher. Save some countries, where democratic system is in place, every country is those where speaking against the King, Sultan, Khalifa, Sheikh or the incumbent ruler is next to impossible. Moreover, media-outlets are also state-controlled.

## (12) Violence against and restraints on women:

It is unfortunate that the Muslim countries have not implemented the rules and laws laid down by Islam in the realm of women rights. They are deprived of their equal rights to inheritance, education, freedom etc. Killing them in the name of honour is vogue in Pakistan.

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### (13) Regional and Linguistic Prejudices:

Even in the present epoch in history, there are many sorts of prejudices and bias in Muslim countries. For instance, the slogan of Arab nationalism is also heard quite often.

### (14) Moral degeneration:

Many vices like parasitism, nepotism and cronyism, hypocrisy, sanctimony, sexual assaults are eating the Muslim societies up with every passing moment.

### (15) Ijtihad in the doldrums:

The opinions of scholars which they deduce from the conjunctions of the Holy Quran and Sunnah are considered as asset that the Muslim scholars collected and left as legacy for the generations of Muslims to come. But, with the passage of time, a large number of changes have taken place and there was a strong need to review those opinions and again resort to the original sources i.e. Quran and Sunnah, for seeking guidance. But, unfortunately that could not happen. Though, there is certainly an institution in Jeddah under the patronage of OIC that is not just not enough mainly because in the first instance, it is a

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recommendatory body i.e. it presents suggestions only but is also devoid of the power to implement those. Secondly, its ambit of working is not so vast.

### (16) Failure to portray real, pro-civilization and pro-development image of Islam:

The Muslims have become the subject of ridicule and humiliation. The plight and predicament of the Muslims in the fields of politics, science, governance, civility and their fundamentalism, intolerance and machinations of al-Qaeda, Taliban, Daesh etc. have rendered attempts to portray Islam in positive sense in utter failure.





## External Challenges:

### (i) West's Cultural Invasion:

During the heyday of western domination in Muslim world, in the nineteenth century, the Islamic Ummah endured a twofold assault:

- (a) political subjugation
- (b) alienation from its institutions and values.

Islam was belittled and ridiculed and was made to appear backward, barbaric and a source of embarrassment. The Ummah was de-culturalized in such a way as to ensure that it would not be able to recover and reorganize itself again into a vital force.

According to Arnold Toynbee

"The struggling Muslims are once more facing the West with their backs to the wall. But this time the odds are more heavily against them, for the West is superior to them not only in arms but also in the economy."

Under the western domination a liberal elite was created which treated its own faith and history with indifference and unconcealed contempt. A sense of inferiority was injected into the masses. The West has a covert agenda to imbue the whole Muslim world with its culture and civilisations.

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## (2) The quest of the west to seize resources:

Historically, the west has been perpetually following the policies to get hold of the resources owned by the Muslims to save those for their future use. It is elaborately manifest that the Americans and the Europeans have been indulged into wars only to control the oil resources of the Muslim world.

## (3) West's role in internally destabilizing Muslim States:

The west has been following a multi-pronged strategy to destabilise Muslim countries internally so that any Muslim country may not be strong enough to pose a threat to them.

## (4) Creation of Israel: A Jewish State:

The great Britain contributed hugely to establish a Jewish state, i.e. Israel, and today the US is patronizing this illegitimate state. The west does not pay heed to the cries of innocent Palestinians when they are brutally and bombed and annihilated by the savage Israelis who are at liberty to exterminate as many of Palestinian Muslims as they wish. This has also contributed to the problems of Umrat

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### (5) Mockery of Islamic values:

The caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) published every now and then ignite and agitate the Muslims in all corners of the world. In 2005, first the blasphemous caricatures of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) were published by a damned Danish newspaper "Jylland-Posten". Islamophobia among the Christian world of today was manifest in the acts of a rightist US pastor Terry Jones who on March 20, 2011, committed the abominable act of desecrating the Holy Quran. Islam is attacked by these infidels every other day mistaking rather abusing the name of "Freedom of Expression".

(6)

### (6) Dual standards of justice in the western world:

When there was a movement in East Timor for succession, a separate state was created without any delay because in this way a Christian state was being created. But when it comes to Kashmir, the west does not pay any heed to the wailings of the Kashmiris. These dual standards have give rise to various problems.

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## (7) Globalization: Modern Form of Colonization:

Globalization as defined by west is the expansion of international economic activity. Now, globalization in its current manifestation is benefiting the west as their idea of borderless world simply means the unbridled flow of capital across borders.

It is irony that muslim countries despite being endowed with rich natural resources are playing in the hands of west led international financial institutions (IMF, World Bank and WTO) are fleecing the resources of muslim countries.



## Solutions According to the teaching of Islam:

### (i) Unity of Ummah:

There are explicit teachings in the Holy Quran regarding unity; the violation of which may invite severe punishments. Allah says in Surah Al-Imran:

"And hold fast, all together, by the rope which Allah (stretches out for you), and be not divided among yourselves."

Surah Al-Imran

"As for those who divide their religion and break up into sects, thou hast no part in them on the least: their affair is with Allah: He will in the end tell them the truth of all that they did."

Surah Al-Anfal:

"And obey Allah and His messenger, and fall into no disputes, lest ye lose heart and your power."

The importance of unity has been mentioned in the Quran and Sunnah along with the severe consequential punishment owing to the disunity. The Muslim world needs to address the current challenges faced by the Muslims, particularly the sectarian divide among Muslims, which is a major hurdle in evolving a unified response to these challenges. The collaboration among all segments of Muslim societies is imperative to generate effective responses to the challenges.

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## (2) Retrospection, Self-Introspection and Rectification:

It is crucial for ~~respond~~ Muslims to stop finding faults in others for their failures and start focusing on their own selves. Muslims should engage in self-introspection and diagnose their problems and iron out their pragmatic solutions.

## (3) New Systems of social behaviours inspired by faith:

Islam is a way of organizing existence. The Islamic blueprint for the organization of society must be tirelessly reworked and translated into acts. Islam contains a social message which needs to be translated into a project for collective action.

Islam is a message of brotherhood, justice, endeavours and liberation. To be a Muslim is to live in accordance with divine principles. Humanism, universalism and sociality here take on their true meaning, which is one and the same: a total integration into God's vision and an active abandonment to God.

"And whoever submits himself wholly to Allah and he is the doer of good (to others), he indeed has taken hold of the firmest thing upon which one can lay hold; and Allah is

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the end of affairs  
(Lupman 31:22)

#### (4) Focusing on Scientific education and IT.

Islam promotes rational thinking and innovation. However Muslims lag far behind the other nations in almost every field of modern education and thus it must be an area of concern for all the Muslims in the world. Muslims should develop a system of education that could cater their religious and spiritual needs as well as the contemporary requirements to eradicate illiteracy from Muslim societies. Establishment of universities of the science and technology with shared investments. Establishing various research institutes to counter the rising influence of the western culture and to implement the deductions inferred thereupon. Creating joint institutions to respond to the objectives raised by the non-Muslim scholars are some suggestions to heed.

#### (5) Need for Ijtihad:

There is a growing need for ijtihad and renewal of understanding of new methods for progressing according to

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Islam in modern times. Islam should be embodied in every field of knowledge, ethics and actions. Religious Scholars should play their role in promoting Utrahad on various issues like Sectarian harmony etc

### (6) Reinterpreting the whole Edifice of Islamic Theology:

What Muslims must do is to go back to the teachings of Holy Quran and genuine Hadiths, study and interpret them in the context of the present day

### (7) Media to Counter Cultural Onslaught of the West:

Appeal to Islamic governments to cooperate with the private sector for the establishment of joint information, advertising projects and supporting and encouraging information industries. Can be one of the valuable suggestions

Moreover, the infrastructure of Muslim countries should be linked together. Commercial information and advertising representation unified communication mechanism consolidated and an Islamic information bloc set up. This will free Muslims from western information domination.

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## (2) Muslims should portray peaceful Image of Islam:

Muslims need to effectively propagate that violence had no place in Islam. No religion taught violence, no has any prophet propagated it. Islam is basically the deen of peace.

## (9) Train of Globalization:

To the muslim states like to survive this deluge, they must build an Islamic bridge to the train of globalization.

## (10) Effective role of OIC:

OIC has an important role to play in the current scenario, which could be achieved by bringing the muslim countries together on a common platform. There is the problem of implementation of different decisions taken by the OIC; in order to overcome these constraints, a collective will is required on part of the whole Ummah. Reorganization of OIC is needed as well. Restructuring the world muslim congress (Mojama'at Al-Aalam Al-Islami) and the muslim world league (Rabita Alam-e-Islami) Both these organisations should be reinvigorated and their offices be

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established in all Muslim States. A separate task force should also be formed to actualise them. The organisation must be freed from the claws of Saudi financial and management dominance. It should be purged of the west and its influences. It should strive to gain a permanent seat in UNSC for organisations.

### (ii) Joint defence:

Muslim countries should have a joint defence mechanism as the Europe has in form of NATO. Make joint investments to set up ordnance plants for the production of weaponry. A joint force whose successive chiefs may come from different countries. The training of this joint force should be conducted on Islamic lines so that the idols of nationalism, regionalism and linguistic pride may be shattered.

### (2) Common Economy

Muslim countries should adopt policies so as to be self-reliant and come out of the jaws of Christians and Jews. Following steps can be formulated in this regard:

- Make a common currency like Euro in Europe.
- Establish joint multinational companies



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- Eliminate usury and make economies Zakat and ushr based
- Remove restrictions on trade among Muslim states.
- Ease us a policy
- Foster interest-free banking.

### (11) High moral values:

Put in collective efforts to eradicate falsehoods, animosity, ill will, jealousy, prejudices etc. There should be a modern instructions to reforms and to invite people towards religion and to impart the knowledge of Quran and Sunnah usage of modern facilities to propagate and spread religion.

### (12) Rule of Law and Justice:

- Set up of a joint committee of Muslim countries for the purpose of Ijtihad.
- There should be establishment of a joint parliamentary union and an Islamic Court of justice after the pattern of International Court of Justice. Moreover, formulate a collective system of justice where everyone is equal before law.