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## Western Perception of Islam.

### ① Introduction:

Notwithstanding the few progressive voices, the Western perception of Islam is primarily negative. It is driven by systematic media biasness, geopolitical factors, rise in extremist elements, failure of the Muslim scholars to counter it and Westophobia in the Muslim world. This negative perception is, however, contrary to the true teachings of Islam and needs to be countered.

② The Western perception of Islam is not exclusively negative (counter perspective).

③ The Western perception of Islam is primarily negative.

- a) Islam: The religion of terror and violence
- b) Islam: Antithetical to

democracy and individual  
Freedom

- c) Islam: Hostile to Innovation and modernity.
- d) Islam: An expansionist Ideology; Islamofascism.
- e) Islam: Heralds Misogyny

④ What are the underlying causes of Western negative perception of Islam:

- (a) Systematic media biasness
- (b) Populist leader use the negative perception for political interests.
- (c) Failure on part of Muslim scholars; Abandonment of Jihad.
- (d) Westophobia: The rising anti-western sentiments in the Muslim world.
- (e) The Rise in number of Terrorist elements and Extremism.

⑤ How the Negative Perception of Islam can be transformed into positive:

- (a) Present the true image of Islam through

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## Media.

- ① Muslim scholars need to play a proactive role; utilize the tool of Ijtihad.
- ② Counter populist leaders through International Organization.

## ③ Conclusion.

"I want to kill all the Muslims - I did my bit" shouted 48 years old Darren Osborne after driving his van into a group of worshipers in London. The incident killed a 51 year old man and left another nine seriously injured. This is just one incident of the West hatred towards muslim and Islam. The incidents of Quran desecration, mosques vandalism and production of caricatures of the Prophet PBUH has become a norm in the West. Equating the act of terrorism with Islam, the West deems Islam a religion of violence of terror. Similarly, it is viewed incompatible with democracy, with no room for individual freedom and liberty. Parallels are drawn between Islam and Fascism with the conclusion that like Fascism, Islam is an expansionist ideology with the goal of conquering the whole world. In addition, it is viewed as misogynistic in nature.

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The factors responsible for this negative perception are many: the media biasness in the West towards Islam and the use of this negative perception for political interests. Similarly, in the Muslim world, the rise in number of terrorist groups, failure on part of Muslims scholars and the rising Westophobic sentiments amplify the negative perception of Islam in the West. Effective use of media and a proactive role on part of scholars are required to counter the negative perception and to present Islam to the West in its pristine form. Besides inter faith dialogues on international forums are needed for clearing the misconception about Islam in the West. Hence, notwithstanding the few progressive voices, the Western perception of Islam is primarily negative. It is driven by systematic media biasness, geopolitical factors, rise in extremist

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elements and failure of the Muslim scholars and rising Westophobia. This negative perception is, however, contrary to the true teaching of Islam and needs to be countered.

Before going into the discussion of dominantly negative perception of Islam in the West it is pertinent to discuss the few sane voices. These voices, albeit rare, view Islam as a religion of peace and a positive force rather than being a religion of terror. For instance, William Montgomery Watt, a Scottish orientalist in his book 'Muhammad: Prophet and Statesman', vehemently rejects the polemical accounts of the Prophet PBUH. Similarly, Bernard Lewis in his book 'Islam and the West' maintains that those involved in terrorism in the name of Islam have no idea that Islam does not justify the killing of innocent people. Hence, the Western perception of Islam is not

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rather exclusively negative  
also positive perceptions  
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The voices that view Islam positively are, however, rare. The general perception of Islam in the West is negative. The most common negative perception of Islam in the West is equating Islam with terror. The West, dominantly, view Islam as inherently violent and prone to intolerance. The rise in extremist and terrorist outfits like ISIS, Boko Haram, etc, are viewed as representative of Islam. Robert Spencer in his book 'Religion of peace? Why Christianity is and Islam is not' through cherry-picking presents a skewed narrative of Islam as fundamentally violent. Thus at the heart of West's negative perception of Islam is the view that Islam is a religion of terror.

Similarly, the West view Islam as antithetical to democracy and individual freedom. The Islamic political system is disregarded altogether as an absolute totalitarian system with no room for individual



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Freedom. Richard Dawkins in the book 'The God Delusion' views Islam as extremely collectivist system where state and society's goals and ambitions are prioritized over individuals. The caliphate is portrayed as dictatorship with the caliph being a despot.

Likewise, Islam is deemed hostile to innovation, progress and modernity. The West presumes Islam to be based on dogmas and rigid ideas. Similarly, it perceives Islam to oppose science and technology and an opposing force to progress. Christopher Hitchen, for instance, in his book 'God is not great' says that Islam is a death to intellect. Moreover, he believes Islam to despise art and literature and that Islam considers it a source of decadence and degeneracy. Similarly, Walid Phares, a card carrying Islamophobe, views Islam to be rejecting the basis of modern international society: modernity. Thus, the

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West considers Islam as opposition to progress and modernity.

Moreover, Islam is viewed to be purely based on expansionist ideology. Parallels are drawn between Islam and fascism. The word 'Islamofascism' is ~~also~~ <sup>abundantly</sup> found in literature, media and in public discourse. Cardinal Raymond Leo Burke, an American bishop, in an interview with Catholic Herald journal, opines that Islam believes itself to be destined to rule the world and that it has elements dedicated to the conquest of whole world. Similarly, the former US president Donald Trump ban on muslims entry into the US was out of fear of Islamization of the US. Hence, the West perceives Islam to be aiming at conquering the whole world and enforcing Islam throughout the world.

The negative perceptions

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are not confined merely to the political system and intellectual stagnation of Islam. The West also finds problems in social system of Islam. It views Islam heralding a culture of misogyny and gender discrimination. The West views that women are inferior and marginalized section of the Muslim society. They augment their claims by the prevalence, in the society, of domestic violence against women, child marriages, honour killings, and unequal rights in inheritance. Similarly, the discriminatory divorce and marriage laws as practiced in muslim world are given as proof of systematic bias against women in Islamic legal system.

To cope with the negative perception of Islam in the West, it is pertinent to dig out the underlying causal factors behind this negative perception. The most prominent among

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such factors is the systematic media biasness against Islam. Muslims are negatively portrayed by the media for ratings and commercial purposes. Perpetrators perceived to be muslims receive more media coverage as compared to those perceived as non-muslims. For instance no one knows about Justin Carl Moose, a self-described christian counterpart of Osama bin Laden who planned to blow an abortion clinic. Not a single story nor an article was published by the so called 'independent press'. On the contrary, Antonio Martinez, who was alleged to have planned a terrorist activity in the name of Islam was all over the media with New York Times and Washington Post publishing 10 articles over the incident. The Institute of Social Policy and Understanding (ISPU), reports that muslim perpetrators receive a 770% more media coverage than their

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counterpart.

Besides media

biasness, -the negative perception of Islam in the West is amplified by politicians for political gains. populist leaders use anti-Islamic rhetoric to gain power, influence and legitimacy. The protracted negative perception of Islam is thus cashed by politicians. For instance, "a total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States" was part of the 2016 Donald Trump election campaign. Similarly, French leader Marine Le Pen anti Islamic views appeal to the masses who hold some views against Islam. These politicians sell the notion of 'threats to the western culture from Islam' to win over them and garner their support in elections. Thus, the already present negative perception of Islam is further amplified by politicians for political purposes.

The factors responsible

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For the negative perception of Islam are not confined to the West alone. The Muslim world too is responsible for this negative perception. The rise in number of radical ~~ist~~ elements in the Muslim world is responsible for the negative perception of Islam in the West. Groups like Al-Qaeda, IS, Boko Haram spread and commit terror in the name of Islam. They aim for establishing the rule of Islam all over the world. The acts of terror unleashed by these elements in the world bolsters the West perception that Islam is a religion of terror. Similarly, the goal of establishing an Islamic Caliphate in the world amplifies the West perception that Islam is an expansionist ideology.

Not only these extremist elements, but the Muslim Ummah in general and scholars in particular are responsible for the negative

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perception of Islam in the West. The Muslim scholars fail to counter the extremist elements that whatever they are doing has nothing to do with the teachings of Islam. Moreover, the failure on part of scholars to utilize the tool of Ijtihad has further exacerbated the negative perception of Islam in the West. Abandonment of Ijtihad has led to stagnation of ideas and failure to resonate with new realities. Consequently, the perception that Islam is a retrogressive religion, incompatible with modern society is reinforced.

Besides the failure on part of Muslim scholars to the deeply pervaded anti-western sentiments in Muslim society is aggravating the negative perception of Islam in the West. The 'Westphobia' stems from the perception in the Muslim world that the West poses a threat to Islam. Resultantly, everything

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associated with the West like education, medicine or the non-governmental organizations having association with the West are viewed with skepticism. Resultantly, the Western view of Islam as intolerant and prejudiced religion is intensified. Thus, Westphobia in the Muslim world hampers the negative perception of Islam in the West.

The future of humanity is dependent on global peace to be fostered through mutual respect of all the religions, tolerance and equality. In this context, the negative perception of Islam, which is hindering global peace, need to be addressed. Media in this regard can play a significant role. Given its power and penetration, particularly in the West, it can be used in the cause of conveying the true teachings of Islam. Through media, the West need to be made aware through media of the fact that



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Islam instinctively believe in respect for diversity, human rights and tolerance. Besides, it must be conveyed to the West that the social maladies in the Muslim world are purely the result of indigenous culture rather than of the teaching of Islam. The opening of an English TV channel by Pakistan, Turkey and Malaysia was a good initiative. Such initiatives need to be multiplied so that more media space is given to present the Islam in its true shape and counter the media biasness that fuels the negative posture of Islam in the West.

Besides media, the scholars need to play a proactive role in countering the negative perception of Islam. The Muslim scholars need to respond rationally rather than ~~be~~ being reactionary to the West anti-Islamic rhetoric. In this regard, the tool

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of Ijتهاد needs to be utilized to address the new challenges. Learning from the past endeavours of Muslim scholars, -the contemporary Muslim scholars need to play an active role in bridging the gap between -the West and Muslim world. In -the past, for instance, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan -through his 'Essays on the Life of Prophet PBUH' responded and countered Sir William Muir's offensive book, 'The Life of Muhammad'. Through -this and other such efforts, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan pacified -the British and conveyed -the true teaching of Islam. Such efforts are needed from the contemporary scholars as well. Internally in -the Muslim world too, -the scholars need to make -the people aware of Islam's original message: peace, tolerance and respect for humanity with no compulsion on anyone in matters of religion.

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Likewise, the negative perception of Islam in the West needs to be addressed politically as well. International forums like the United Nations Alliance of Civilization (UNAOC) need to be used in this regard. Through such forums of inter-faith dialogues should be conducted. Besides, it should be made clear that there is no 'clash of civilization', rather there is a clash of ignorance and political interests on both sides. Collective political efforts need to be afoot to counter elements which harp the strings of religious hatred for their vested political interests. Besides, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), which is already playing a role, needs to play a more proactive role. The OIC heavyweights, which hold a sway over the West on the back of their economic prowess, should lobby in the West against populist

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leader who malign Islam by spreading negativity about it. Hence, the negative perception of Islam in the West can be thwarted through global and regional political organizations.

Conclusively, the West, apart from a few sane voices, view Islam negatively. Islam is associated with terrorism. It is considered retrogressive, obsolete and dormant, not compatible with modern society and democracy. Similarly, it is viewed as discriminatory towards women and misogynist in nature. The underlying factors behind this negative perception lie both in the West as well as in the Muslim World. In the West, media biasness towards Islam and exploitation of this negative narrative by politicians for political purpose drive the negative perception of Islam. Similarly, in the Muslim world, failure on part of muslim

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scholar to counter this narrative, utilize the tool of Ijtihad and bring awareness among the Muslims is responsible for this negative perception. The West must be conveyed to the true teachings of Islam: Islamic teachings are in line with democracy, pluralism and human rights. In this regard media should be used effectively to reach out to masses. Besides, Muslim scholars need to shoulder responsibility in addressing the negative perception. Finally, international forums need to be used for inter faith dialogue, and addressing the differences pertaining to religion through accommodation and dialogue. For the world to remain in peace the West can not play with religious sentiments of 1.8 billion Muslims.