

## **Sectarianism, Hybrid War and Rebuilding New CENTO; Finding a Transnational Initiative for Revival of Muslim Ummah**

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### **Abstract**

The Ummah's unity has been shattered by the divide-and-rule machinations of the US through its "Global War on Terror", seemingly rendering the dream of pragmatic geopolitical cooperation between the world's majority-Muslim states a political fantasy. The so-called "Clash of Civilizations" hasn't just been weaponized to provoke inter-civilizational conflicts, but also intra-civilizational ones too, which in the Ummah's case took the form of violent sectarianism. While "conventional knowledge" would suggest that there's no surmounting these obstacles in the near future, Iran might actually be able to pioneer a breakthrough if it revives and reforms the Old Cold War-era CENTO alliance of itself, Pakistan, Turkey, and Iraq in order to symbolically contradict the sectarian trend and enter into mutually beneficial strategic relations with its three most important neighbors.

### **Keywords:**

Ummah, Iran, Pakistan, Turkey, Iraq, CENTO, Clash of Civilizations, Multipolarity, Sectarianism, Hybrid War.

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### **Introduction**

The underdeveloped, internally weak, frustrated and conflict-ridden contemporary Muslim World is in a state of crisis. The Muslim World, which has suffered at the hands of the West in the past and remains, even today, weak materially, economically, technologically and militarily, is now being projected as a threat to the West (Salih, 2014, p. 9). The Ummatic efforts to rediscover its identity and set its own house in order are looked upon as a challenge to the West. For Muslims, it is habitual to accuse major global powers for all their ills. Possibly, this excuse may give them some relief; it does not provide the solution to their deep rooted internal problems. These internal ills not only cause corrosion to the Ummah but also open the doors for external powers to meddle in their internal affairs. How did the Muslim World get into this situation and what are the possible solutions to come out of these crises? And also, how can the Muslim World regain the dignity of its glorious past to lead in global affairs?

Around five decades ago, it is believed that 'man now lives in a global-sized village, and is returning to the values and perceptions of a preliterate culture.' In the third millennium we are actually experiencing a situation where peoples and their cultures are exhibiting increasingly hybrid characteristics. Although, it can be argued that much of this is not new, as human beings have always been engaged in a process of interaction throughout history, today's globalization is different, primarily because of the speed with which it is taking place. It is driven by new forms of connectivity, such as the internet and the global media, and is governed by different rules, or, in many cases, by no rules at all (Aden, 1969, pp. 357-358).

Current situation reflects that the Muslim World is volatile, internally weak, unstable, and dependent on the major global players. It can be judged from the fact that the total GDP of all Muslim countries put together is even less than six percent of the world's total. This is in spite of the fact that Muslim countries produce most of the world's oil and minerals. In addition to accusing others, Muslim leaders and scholars have been misleading themselves by constant reference to a magnificent past and a utopian future which fails to confront the realities of the modern world where rational and national considerations leave little room for sentimental responses.

The present Muslim states have also failed in their efforts to create credible and inspiring role models. The ruling authorities of the Muslim World often misinterpret the realities of the situation by ignoring the vital issues of poverty, hunger, inadequacy and widespread illiteracy that limit

social justice and economic progress (UNDP, 2009, pp. 195-198). Therefore, in many Muslim countries social problems are so deeply rooted as to leave the state in a position of complete vulnerability. The ultimate impact of such social weaknesses is not only internal, but also adversely affects the overall global position of these countries' standing in the world.

In the context of the under-developed Muslim World, one factor has emerged that holds significant repercussions for us all and that is the fact that the rapid changes which occurred in the last decade of the twentieth century have all arisen as a result of the modernization process and its consequent destabilization effects. This paper can be considered as a self-reflective narrative and a personal dialogue in the context of the contemporary Muslim World. As the title indicates, the main focus of this paper is to analyze the major challenges faces by the Muslim Ummah.

### **1. Theoretical Framework**

Constructivists view the international order not as states vying for power in an anarchical system but as a "social structure infused with ideational factors to include norms, rules, and law". As part of this emphasis on ideational factors, constructivists place high importance on the interaction and exchanges between actors and how such interactions shape not only the actors and preferences, but also the structures that surround them. Constructivists believe that this mutually shaping or mutual constitution is something that is a continuous process which can evolve over time (Viotti and Kaupi, 2012, p. 278).

Studying identity re-emerged as a field in international relations after the Cold War. It became particularly important for scholars of constructivism in understanding elements of foreign policy that cannot be explained merely by rationalist explanations. But while constructivism considers ideological concepts such as identity, norms and values as significant factors, that influences and shapes states' behaviour (Epstein, 2010, p.1). The notion that international relations are not only affected by power politics, but also by ideas, is shared by writers who describe themselves as constructivist theorists. According to this view, the fundamental structures of international politics are social rather than strictly material. This leads to social constructivists to argue that changes in the nature of social interaction between states can bring a fundamental shift towards greater international security.

Constructivists view the concept of security as being "condition by social interaction rather than an objective calculation determined by the distribution of military capabilities" (Viotti and Koppi, 2012, p. 291). This concept and others mentioned previously play a large role in the works of

constructivists who analyze the Middle Eastern conflicts. Religion especially Islamic identity in the region with supplying a base with common behavioral rules and provisions can create a firm institute for attraction of followers. So Islamic identity as a base in the Middle East region can cause convergence and political development and convergence factors are: Social-technological, economic, geographical and political factors and values (Hossein Moghaddam and Ejlal, 2012, p. 126).

In recent years, identity has had an important place in social sciences and also in the international relations since 1990s till now, numerous and extensive discussions about identity have been proposed, National, religious and Islamic identity (Moshirzadeh, 2004, p. 165). This paper is aimed to review challenges for being a Muslim Ummah in the Middle East and possible solution from a constructivist point of view.

## **2. Research Methodology**

The grounded theory approach will be the research methodology. It offers a flexibility to shape and reshape one's research once a researcher begins proceeds and finishes their research. It helps a researcher to gain a wide range of knowledge about phenomena and provides a method for developing hypotheses to analyze them. To gather rich data, the methodology will include textual analyses from local government policy, scientific books, biographical books or mass media (online and printed). This will help to provide supplementary data, especially concerning the challenges in way of being a united community.

## **3. The International Muslim Community in Post-Cold War Era**

The international Muslim community (Ummah) is first and foremost a spiritual concept but one that's increasingly come to take on moral and geopolitical importance since the end of the Old Cold War and especially after the US embarked on its "Global War on Terror". The community of the faithful is a sacred concept in Islam that connects every believer with one another, particularly through the religious obligation that Muslims have to help their fellow co-confessionals if they're being oppressed. However, The Ummah, or Muslim community, is a group of people from diverse backgrounds, ancestry, locations and nationalities. They are a community without borders yet united in a very real way. Though separated by distance and often constrained by borders they are united. They are one nation or community united under the guidance of the One God (Houtsma, 1987, pp. 125-126).

The concept of Ummah might seem to correspond to our understanding of a nation, but there are important differences. The nation is a

strictly political concept; it may be defined as a community of peoples possessing a given territory with their own government; citizenship involves giving allegiance to the State, independently of a person's religious commitment. By contrast, citizenship in the Ummah very much involves commitment to a particular religion. To the Muslim way of thinking, the only Ummah that counts is the Ummah Islamiyyah, the Islamic Community, an entity that theoretically comprises all Muslims throughout the world, whatever their national origin. In Islamic thought, "The Ummah" represents a universal world order, ruled by an Islamic government in accordance with the "Law of God" (the Shariah, Islamic religious law), and patterned after the community founded by the prophet Muhammad at Medina; it even includes Jews and Christians living within its territory as separate (and inferior) communities (Al-Rasheed, 2012, pp. 3-5).

#### **4. Challenges for Being Ummah**

Today, the Muslim World, as a whole, faces a number of challenges as evidenced by the serious problems that beset individual Muslim countries. Some of the most important ones are as follow:

##### **4-1. Land and Border Disputes**

Land and border disputes are the most significant bilateral and multilateral disagreements among Islamic countries. In addition to imposing human and financial costs on the economies and societies, these disputes create grounds for more interference and abuse by the foreign powers. These differences are major obstacles to creating integration and understanding among Islamic countries and the revival of Muslim Ummah. There are now many different territorial disputes in the Islamic world (Drysdale, pp. 116-118).

##### **4-2. Nationalism and Racism**

Nationalism and Racism are two factors that can affect the integration between Islamic countries in two macro and micro levels causing divergence. Until the transmission of nationalistic ideas from Europe to the Muslim World, the idea of Islamic unity within the framework of a single power constituted the dominant ideology of the Islamic world. However, the influence of nationalism in the Muslim World, which was composed of many ethnic groups and nations, led to emergence of national governments by creating different types of Arabic, Turkish, and Iranian nationalism (Alibabaei, 1995, pp. 106-107).

On the other hand, sectarianism has exacerbated ethnic and religious conflicts in the Muslim Ummah and have prevented the formation of a unified Islamic identity by creating divergence. Historical review suggests

that opposing the realization of the unity between Sunni and Shiite by extremist religious sects have been one of the serious obstacles to realizing the unity of Muslims and Islamic countries.

#### **4-3. Diversity of Political Systems**

A variety of political systems, from absolute monarchy to republic, can be identified in Islamic countries. This diversity and difference in political systems and structures are among the factors that undermine the foundations of coalition, alliance, and unity. Similar political systems would feel more close to one another while there is a sense of rivalry among countries with different political systems. Therefore, it is very difficult to create an alliance among countries that belong to several different groups.

#### **4-4. Political Instability and Negative Competition**

Political instability in some Islamic countries, due to the weakness of political institutions and political structures in pursuit of popular legitimacy, undermines the likelihood of integration, since the greater the internal stability and the ability of foreign policy decision makers to provide domestic benefits, the higher the ability of these countries to actively participate in the process of integration.

On the other hand, political instability can lead to coup, revolution, war and armed conflicts, ongoing crises, ethnic and racial disputes, and eventually, displacement of power. The displacement of power leads to sudden transformation in that country's ruling system, and as a result, the change in priorities of its foreign policy objectives. Experts believe that this situation not only reduces the national power of a country, but also makes it impossible for the country to pursue foreign policy, integration, and cooperation with other countries while other countries also hesitate in adopting a policy of convergence with such countries (Qavam, 1998, pp. 82-84).

#### **4-5. Dependence on Foreign Powers**

Islamic lands have always been points of interests for dominant powers both for strategic reasons and their natural resources. In order to maintain and enhance their interests, the great powers have always sought to establish subordinate systems and rulers in the Islamic countries, and intensify hostilities and negative rivalries among these countries with their neighbors through special plans and programs. That's why these foreign powers have started to intensify disputes and rivalries and increase divergence among Islamic countries using deterrent factors to create suspicion and division as soon as the issue of divergence has been seriously raised (Safavi, 2008, p.

206).

In addition, lack of alignment of Islamic countries in foreign policy and the political, economic and military structural dependence of some Islamic countries to colonial powers has led these countries not only fail to carry out practical measures for realization of the unifying objectives with other Islamic countries in order to maintain their power and government, but to create barriers to the realization of these ideals in order to secure the interests of foreign powers.

#### **4-6. Sectarianism; New Multidimensional Challenge**

Understanding of Muslim Ummah could have been expected to naturally contribute to the integration of Muslim-majority countries in the face of America's onslaught on their region, but sectarian conflicts have divided the community and made this more of a principle to aspire to than anything realistic in practice at the moment. In examining this phenomenon, sectarianism or sectarian conflict in the Middle East are often presented as having centuries-old religious and theological roots. It is often said that sectarianism runs so deep in the region that it cannot be defeated, and we shouldn't bother trying. This is a widespread western view in the media, policy circles, and in some corners of the academia (Abdo, 2017, pp. 144-145). Armed non-state sectarian actors have emerged as a reaction to a set of domestic and external conditions that are all related to the failure of state building in the Middle East and particularly the states' inability to perform their key functions, such as warding off external threats, providing adequate public services and protecting the civil rights of its citizens (Bensahel, 2004, p. 153).

#### **5. Clash of Civilizations or Clash within Civilizations?**

The so-called "Clash of Civilizations" concept that became popular during the onset of the US' "Global War on Terror" is essentially a blueprint for dividing and ruling the Eastern Hemisphere in the 21st century, but it's just as dangerous when it comes to provoking intra-civilizational clashes as it is for inter-civilizational ones. In other words, Inter-civilizational conflicts are what the US is trying to provoke between Islam and the West, or Islam and Hinduism, for example, while intra-civilizational conflicts are between those said civilizations (liberals vs conservatives in the West, moderate vs fundamentalist Islam/Hinduism, etc.). The Clash of Civilizations is a hypothesis that people's cultural and religious identities will be the primary source of conflict in the post-Cold War world (Huntington, 1993, p. 22).

Therefore, here, it is important to discuss briefly the works of two famous American intellectuals, Francis Fukuyama and Samuel Huntington.

Both have been given enormous coverage by the global media due to which their books received extensive publicity all over the world. In 1992, after the demise of the Soviet Union, Fukuyama (a former US State Department official) presented the concept of the end of history. His book entitled *End of History and the Last Man* (1993) is mainly a supremacist declaration of triumph. His argument is that after the fall of communism, capitalist liberal societies are the end-product of the historical process of humankind. In other words, it is now only Western socio-cultural and politico-economic liberty that will prevail in the world. He also believes that the days of Islam are over. It must be mentioned here that in spite of extensive discussions in his book, Fukuyama did not elaborate on the strategy which should be adopted to attain and maintain a stable global society through the political and economic liberty of the 'last man'. And also, how this 'last man' will enjoy this newly discovered paradise.

This issue is 'skilfully' tackled by Samuel Huntington. His book *Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (1997) warns that the point of the 'end of history' is the beginning of the civilizational war to dominate the world. He predicts that future wars will not be fought between nation states, but between civilizations. He has written extensively and lectured to promote his ideas. His emphasis is: i) civilizational consciousness is on the rise, ii) conflicts between civilizations will replace ideological and state conflict, iii) conflicts between groups from different civilizations will be more violent than those between groups within civilizations, iv) political, economic and security relations will develop within civilizations rather than cross civilizations, and v) the paramount axis of world politics will be the "West" and the "rest" (Farooqi, 2001, p. 10).

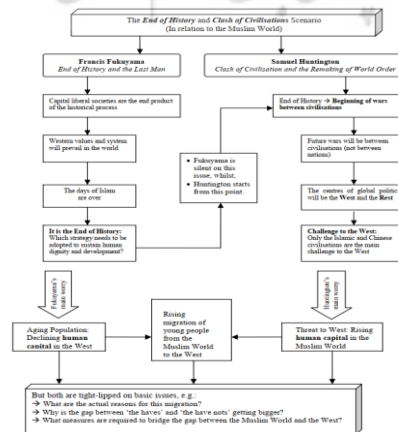
Huntington, indeed, began his thinking by surveying the diverse theories about the nature of global politics in the post-Cold War period. Some theorists and writers argued that human rights, liberal democracy, and the capitalist free market economy had become the only remaining ideological alternative for nations in the post-Cold War world. Specifically, Francis Fukuyama argued that the world had reached the 'end of history' in a Hegelian sense. Huntington believed that while the age of ideology had ended, the world had only reverted to a normal state of affairs characterized by cultural conflict. In his thesis, he argued that the primary axis of conflict in the future will be along cultural lines. As an extension, he posits that the concept of different civilizations, as the highest rank of cultural identity, will become increasingly useful in analyzing the potential for conflict. At the end of his 1993 Foreign Affairs article, "The Clash of Civilizations?", Huntington writes, "This is not to advocate the desirability of conflicts



between civilizations. It is to set forth descriptive hypothesis as to what the future may be like."(Murden, 2011, pp. 416-417)

In addition, the clash of civilizations, for Huntington, represents a development of history. In the past, world history was mainly about the struggles between monarchs, nations and ideologies, such as seen within Western civilization. But after the end of the Cold War, world politics moved into a new phase, in which non-Western civilizations are no longer the exploited recipients of Western civilization but have become additional important actors joining the West to shape and move world history.

Specifically, with regard to Islamic civilization, Huntington suggests that the under-developed, over-stretched and unstable Muslim World spreading from Indonesia to Morocco fails to pose a collective threat to the West. However, in his view, the real threat from the Muslim World is its rising human capital, i.e., the growing proportion of young people in the Islamic civilization. Directly or indirectly, he attempts to warn the West that the troubles in the former Yugoslavia, Kashmir, Palestine or in various other regions are caused by this segment of Islamic civilization. Huntington is unable to answer the question why these young people pose a threat to the West. Interestingly, a careful consideration of these notions reflects that while Huntington warns of the 'rising' human capital of Islamic civilization, Fukuyama warns of the 'declining' human capital of the West, or in other words, the proportionate increase of the aging population in Western civilization. Indirectly, both warn of the rising migration of Muslim youth to western countries which is rapidly changing the demographic balance. Unfortunately, instead of exploring the nature and root causes of major global problems, both Huntington and Fukuyama spend their energies on synthesising a conceptual and ideological network to provide a base to promote misunderstandings and troubles between faiths and ideologies, particularly with regard to the Muslim World. This situation reflects that the promotion of clash of a civilization is an artificial process not a natural phenomenon.



In fact, a creation of the above type of environment promotes global instability and global injustice. The global injustice itself is based on three factors: i) economic: injustices of the global capitalist system which have caused a huge gulf between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots', ii) political: application of double standard in foreign policies by the major global players, and, iii) biased media: which portrays a negative image of the developing countries in general and the Muslim World and Islam in particular. In the present day world where 'global injustice' is common, global instability leads to global violence (Stiglitz, 2002, p. 214). A careful consideration of the post-9/11 situation with regard to the Muslim World reflects that global injustice, global instability and global violence make a vicious circle which keeps the cycle in rotation. In the context of the Muslim World, the intensity of the problem can be realized in the words of the Journalist, John Pilger, 17th September 2004 argues: 'the world is divided into two camps: Islam and "us". That is the unerring message from Western governments, press, radio and television. For Islam, read terrorists.'

#### **6. CENTO Initiative; a Strategic Response to Western Hybrid War Campaign**

The long-dormant sectarian conflict that was violently awoken from its slumber in the aftermath of the US' War on Iraq served the purpose of geopolitically dividing the Ummah and therefore facilitating the spread of American hegemony throughout the strategic energy-rich Mideast pivot space at the tri-continental crossroads of Afro-Eurasia. The Ummah will have serious difficulty recovering from the serious intra-civilizational damage that was done to it since that time, but it's not impossible if Iran proactively takes the initiative.

The US has been running a Hybrid War campaign against its enemies, especially Iran, as an ideological competitor. Hybrid warfare is a military strategy which employs political warfare and blends conventional warfare, irregular warfare and cyber warfare with other influencing methods, such as fake news, diplomacy, and foreign electoral intervention. By combining kinetic operations with subversive efforts, the aggressor intends to avoid attribution or retribution. Hybrid warfare can be used to describe the flexible and complex dynamics of the battle space requiring a highly adaptable and resilient response. US military bodies tend to speak in terms of a hybrid threat, while academic literature speaks of hybrid warfare (Hoffman, 2007, p. 24).

Since the Western media continues to set the terms of international understanding, Washington's interpretation of events around Iran predominates. Iran has never attacked the United States, but the U.S. has in

fact intervened several times in Iran. In 1953, the U.S.—with the UK—overthrew the democratically elected government of Mohammed Mossadeq and over the course of the next two decades provided full support to the unpopular government of the shah of Iran. When the Gulf Arabs pushed Saddam Hussein to attack Iran in 1980, it was the U.S.—and Western Europe—that provided Iraq with arms and money for a bloody eight-year war. All of this context is lost to the Western media, which hyperventilate about fantasy stories such as Hezbollah in Venezuela or Iranian control over the Houthis. It is always Iran that is the aggressor, even when it has been Iran at the receiving end of U.S. aggression (Abrahamian, 2014, pp. 149-153).

Iran's location endows it with the irreplaceable potential of partnering with two of the largest and most powerful Muslim countries in the world, Pakistan and Turkey. Despite being majority Sunni, both of them share centuries-long civilizational commonalities with majority-Shiite Iran that could be geopolitically leveraged to transcend their sectarian differences. In the current international context, Iran is coming under intensified pressure from the US, "Israel", and their Gulf Kingdom allies, compelling the Islamic Republic to urgently seek a pressure valve elsewhere for mitigating the harmful economic and security consequences of this Hybrid War campaign against it. There's no more logical of a place for it to turn than to its Pakistani and Turkish neighbors, which is why Iran must begin prioritizing the creation of a trilateral partnership between them.

Iran, Pakistan, and Turkey could form a stabilizing belt of Muslim Great Powers along the South Eurasian Rimland if they commit to reviving a non-military multipolar version of the Old Cold War-era CENTO alliance that also importantly included Iraq. While there's admittedly a lot of work that would have to be done to turn this into a platform that yields tangible dividends for all its members, it would be a step in the right direction if progress was made on this front as soon as possible, even if only through the creation of a forum between their leaders, businessmen, and/or civil society (including religious) representatives. These four countries have legitimate self-interests in enhancing their cooperation with one another even in spite of the US' sanctions threats. While some previously agreed-upon projects might be scaled back, postponed, or canceled, ties between Iran and its neighbors obviously won't be cut off (Dunbabin, 2014, p. 234).

In other side, the Gulf Kingdoms have traditionally relied upon the US for decades, especially when it comes to ensuring their security and deterring any forcible reaction to their military provocations in the region. Saudi Arabia in particular has been working hand-in-glove with the US and

"Israel" to spark sectarian conflicts in the region, while the UAE now seems to be the US' global partner because of its influence in various ports across the world (especially in the Horn of Africa after the War on Yemen).

The Central Treaty Organization (CENTO), originally known as the Baghdad Pact or the Middle East Treaty Organization (METO), was a military alliance of the Cold War. It was formed in 1955 by Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, Turkey and the United Kingdom and dissolved in 1979. US pressure and promises of military and economic aid were key in the negotiations leading to the agreement, but the United States could not initially participate. John Foster Dulles, who was involved in the negotiations as U.S. Secretary of State under President Dwight D. Eisenhower, claimed that was due to "the pro-Israel lobby and the difficulty of obtaining Congressional Approval." Others said that the reason was "for purely technical reasons of budgeting procedures." In 1958, the US joined the military committee of the alliance. With the withdrawal of Iran, the secretary-general of CENTO, Turkish diplomat Kamran Gurun, announced on March 16, 1979, that he would call a meeting of the pact's council in order to formally dissolve the organization (Hadley, 1971, p. 2). Although it is generally viewed as one of the least successful of the Cold War alliances, but revival of non-military multipolar version of this agreement has this potential to build a strong alliance in the Middle East.

However, this presents a very promising chance to take advantage of geopolitics and reverse-engineer the strengthening of the Ummah. To explain, it was previously mentioned that the Ummah is first and foremost a spiritual concept that eventually took on a moral and geopolitical importance in recent times, but that the US-unleashed "Clash of Civilizations" within it catalyzed a sectarian disaster that all but made the last two aforementioned components unlikely to enter into reality on a large enough scale to be tangibly significant. Nevertheless, the supreme irony is that the intensification of the US' Hybrid War on Iran -- which emerged from the inter-civilizational sectarian conflict that it weaponized for regional divide-and-rule ends throughout the Ummah since the start of the "Global War on Terror"-- might actually end up encouraging the geopolitical integration of part of the Ummah, after which its moral unity might naturally follow. Iran's neighbors would be adversely affected if the country collapsed like the US is trying to have happen, so they each have a self-interested stake in ensuring its stability and helping it offset some of the consequences of the US' Hybrid War. This realization lays the basis for reviving the CENTO concept, albeit to multipolar ends and in a non-military fashion, with a geo-economic emphasis that can then take on geopolitical and moral importance

with time after each of its four members become more comfortable working with one another in this multilateral format (Saikal, 2014, pp. 99-100). Enhancing trade ties, facilitating pilgrimages, strengthening energy cooperation, and ensuring border security are in each of these countries' interests, and while some obstacles might be impossible to surmount at this time, that doesn't mean that progress can't be made at all and shouldn't be pursued.

### **Conclusion**

Rather, there's no better moment than now -no matter how counterintuitive it might seem at first thought -to revive and reform CENTO because Iran, Pakistan, Turkey, and Iraq all have a stake in strengthening their ties with one another, especially given the US' escalating Hybrid War on the Islamic Republic that would be very destabilizing for each and every one of them if it succeeds. Symbolically, the Multipolar CENTO would connect Sunni- and Shiite-majority countries and prove that sectarianism can be overcome through mutually beneficial geopolitical cooperation, after which more morally and spiritually substantive cooperation between the many people in this part of the Ummah could follow. For these reasons and due to its irreplaceable geostrategic location linking together the Muslim Great Powers of Pakistan and Turkey, Iran must urgently take the initiative to re-establish CENTO in a way that advances the entire region's interests and helps rebuild the Ummah after the destructive inter-civilizational sectarian conflict that the US provoked within it at the turn of the millennium through its "Global War On Terror".

The most practical way to begin creating the Multipolar CENTO is for Iran to take the initiative and host a gathering of the Iraqi, Pakistani, and Turkish leaders, though this should be preceded by their respective diplomats, businessmen, and strategists cooperating in pursuit of this goal. Therefore, the first step is for Iran to announce its intent to integrate itself more closely with these four surrounding nations, or even seven if the decision is made to include Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, and Turkmenistan (but involving Afghanistan at this point might not be that feasible given the ongoing war and the Kabul government's unpopularity at home). Then their responsible individuals must come up with some concrete plans to justify the meeting of their heads of states in Tehran, which would be the public rollout of this move. Either way, the initiative will succeed or fail depending on the political will that Iran has to see it through. It mustn't lose this opportunity.

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