

“ISLAM AND FUTURES STUDIES”

(Paper of M. Kamal Hassan for online Webinar organized by IAIS on 5th October 2021, moderated by Assoc. Prof. Dr M. Azam M. Adil, deputy CEO, IAIS Malaysia)

1.Introduction

I would like to begin with the following premises: The futures thinking and planning of individuals is usually based upon how far the future is conceived in the mind of the individual. For most people the future ends with death. The futures thinking and planning of a people is also based on how far the future extends in the imagination or belief of the people. As for the futures thinking and planning of governments, states and nations, they are usually based upon their respective conceptions of the future, or how they each conceive of their futures. The worldviews of Capitalism, Communism, Existentialism, Socialism, Fascism, Postmodernism or Liberal Democracy also determine how futures are conceived, studied or articulated by their proponents.

Similarly, the worldview of Islam as contained in the Qur'an, shapes or dictates the particular way futures are conceived, understood or studied by its adherents. Unfortunately, some Muslims conceive of the future as confined only to existence on planet Earth, while some prefer to focus only on the future of life after death and neglect the great

leadership and management responsibilities that Islam has placed upon the shoulders of Muslims.

The third group of Muslims who are conscious of their worldly responsibilities of *Khilāfah* (Vicegerency) of the earth emphasise the twin roles of *Imārah* (proper development of the world) and *Iṣlāḥ* (valorisation and ethical reform in the world) which includes the sacred duty of “enjoining that which is right and good, and prohibiting that which is bad and wrong” (*al-Amr bi'l-ma'rūf wa'n-nahyu 'an'il-munkar*). They regard the future as going far beyond the worldly existence, and as transcending *al-Dunyā* but the worldview of the Qur'an gives them the right understanding that in order to attain permanent goodness and holistic wellbeing in the Hereafter, it is their duty to live fully in this world and to grapple with its realities in order to make the human life in this world (the *Dunyawī*) as the domain of human striving for moral excellence and for peaceful and beneficial construction of a God-conscious civilisation.

This is the precondition for the ultimate and eternal wellbeing in the future of *al-Ākhirah* (the *Ukhrawī* future). They know that as *Mu'minūn* (Believers) of Allah SWT, they have to strive hard to spread goodness, truth and righteousness in this present life, to oppose as obedient servants of Allah SWT all the forces of Falsehood, Atheism, Defiance of Divine Sovereignty, Oppression and Deception. Their vision of the future is guided by the Divine principle of striving for “goodness in this world” (*ḥasanah fi'd-dunyā*) and “goodness in the Hereafter” (*ḥasanah fi'l-ākhirah*) by which they hope to gain True Success and

Wellbeing (*al-Falāḥ*) and avoid the destiny of True Loss (*al-Khusrān*).

2. The worldview of the Qur'an defines for mankind the ultimate future of mankind.

The Qur'an is replete with references to the ultimate future of mankind, the end of life on earth and the final destruction of the Cosmos by the will of the Creator, Allah SWT. Many different words are used to describe the awesome and terrifying events of the Final Day, but the primary conceptions of the ultimate future are represented by the following words:

AI-ĀKHIRAH (the Hereafter), **YAUM AL-DĪN** (The Day of Judgement), **AL-YAUM AL-ĀKHAR** (The Last Day), **AI-SĀ`AH** (the Last Hour), **AL-MAṢĪR** (the end, the destiny, the ending with Allah), **AL-MARJĪ`** (the return), **AL-JANNAH** (Paradise), **AL-JAHANNAM** (Hell), **AJAL** (appointed time), **LIQĀ' AR-RABB** (meeting with the Lord), **LIQĀ' ALLĀH** (meeting with Allah), **LIQĀ' AL-ĀKHIRAH** (meeting with the Hereafter) and **GHADIN** (tomorrow, i.e. Hereafter).

The Qur'an repeatedly reminds human beings, in several places, of the inescapable ultimate meeting (*liqā`*) with Allah SWT using various derivatives (more than 30 times) of: ...*liqā'anā* (meeting Us, 4 times); *liqā'ihī* (meeting Him, 3 times), etc. In *Sūrah al-Kahf* 18, the Qur'an reminds mankind as follows:

أُولَئِكَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا بِآيَاتِ رَبِّهِمْ وَلِقَائِهِ فَحَبِطَتْ أَعْمَالُهُمْ فَلَا نُقِيمُ لَهُمْ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ وَزْنًا

Those are the ones who refused to believe in the revelations of their Lord and that they are bound to meet Him. Hence, all their deeds have come to naught, and We shall assign no weight to them on the Day of Resurrection. (18:105)

قُلْ إِنَّمَا أَنَا بَشَرٌ مِّثْلُكُمْ يُوحَىٰ إِلَىٰ أَنَّمَا إِلَهُكُمُ اللَّهُ وَاحِدٌ ۚ فَمَن كَانَ يَرْجُوا لِقَاءَ رَبِّهِ ۖ فَلْيَعْمَلْ عَمَلًا صَالِحًا وَلَا يُشْرِكْ بِعِبَادَةِ رَبِّهِ أَحَدًا

Say (O Muhammad): "I am no more than a human being like you; one to whom revelation is made: 'Your Lord is the One and Only God.' **Hence, whoever looks forward to meet his Lord, let him do righteous works, and let him associate none with the worship of his Lord.**" (18:110)

وَلَوْ يُعَجِّلُ اللَّهُ لِلنَّاسِ الشَّرَّ اسْتَعْجَالَهُمْ بِالْخَيْرِ لَقُضِيَ إِلَيْهِمْ أَجْلُهُمْ ۗ فَنذُرُ الَّذِينَ لَا يَرْجُونَ لِقَاءَنَا فِي طُغْيَانِهِمْ يَعْمَهُونَ

Were Allah to hasten to bring upon men (the consequence of) evil in the way men hasten in seeking the wealth of this world, their term would have long since expired. (But that is not Our way.) **So We leave alone those who do not expect to meet Us that they may blindly stumble in their transgression** (10:11).

In the next verse (Q. *al-Hashr* 59: 18) Allah SWT uses the word **ghadin** (tomorrow) to refer to the Hereafter) and reminds every one to be aware of what he/she has done for his/her life in the Hereafter if he or she were to avoid the terrible

punishments in the everlasting future called "TOMORROW", a word that conveys the sense of nearness and immediacy.

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَانظُرُوا نَفْسَ مَا قَدَّمْتُمْ لِغَدٍ
وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ ۖ إِنَّ اللَّهَ خَبِيرٌ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ

Believers,²⁸ fear Allah and let every person look to what he sends forward for the morrow.²⁹ Fear Allah; Allah is well aware of all that you do. (59:18)

28. It is a rule of the Quran that whenever the hypocritical Muslims are taken to task for their hypocrisy, they are given admonition also so that whoever of them has some life left in his conscience, may feel remorse for his conduct and attitude and may make an effort, out of the fear of Allah, to come out of the pit into which his worship of the self has thrown him. This whole section ([verses 18-24](#)) consists of such admonition.

29. For tomorrow: for the Hereafter. That is, this whole worldly life is "today", whose "tomorrow" is the Day of Resurrection, which is going to follow it. Adopting this style Allah has, in a wise manner, made man understand the truth that just as that person is highly foolish, who gambles away his all for the enjoyment of today and does not realize whether tomorrow he would be left with anything to eat and a place of shelter or not, so is also that person only working for his own doom, who is too absorbed in making his world to pay heed to the Hereafter, whereas the Hereafter is to follow this world just as today is to be followed by tomorrow, and there he morrow. Besides, the other wise point here is that every person has been appointed his own censor. Unless a person develops in himself the sense of what is good for him and what is evil, he cannot appreciate whether what he is doing will make his future in the Hereafter or mar it. And when this sense becomes active in himself, he will have to calculate and see for himself whether the way in which he is spending his time, his wealth, his energies

and capabilities leads to Heaven or Hell. To do so is in his own interest; for if he does not do so he will ruin his own future itself. (Maududi 2016)

One word that Allah SWT repeats 115 times in the Qur'an is *al-Ākhirah* which goes to show Allah's supreme concern that human beings become highly conscious of the reality of *al-Ākhirah*, its inevitability and its paramount significance for the sound construction of human civilisation on earth. Allah SWT makes it crystal clear that the present life is a brief and temporary period. It is provided by Allah SWT to be a period of Divine trial and examination whose results would only be known in *al-Ākhirah*. Allah's warning to those "who do not expect to meet Us" (*liqā'aNā*) because they are so engrossed and satisfied with the life of the world is a severe punishment in Hell:

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ لَا يَرْجُونَ لِقَاءَنَا وَرَضُوا بِالْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا
وَاطْمَأَنَّنُوا بِهَا وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ عَنْ آيَاتِنَا غٰفِلُونَ

Surely those who do not expect to meet Us, who are gratified with the life of the world and content with it, and are heedless of Our signs,

أُولَٰئِكَ مَا لَهُمْ النَّارُ بِمَا كَانُوا يَكْسِبُونَ

their abode shall be the Fire in return for their misdeeds (Q. 10: 7-8)

The attitude of true Believers is just the opposite of the Disbelievers. They have total conviction in the Hereafter and are

prepared to face the tests and tribulations in this life. they are willing to make great sacrifices of their wealth and lives for the sake of everlasting bliss in the final Future. From their study of the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet (SAW) they understand that Islam wants all human beings to understand that the future does not stop in this world: it extends beyond this mundane, ephemeral and transient world to the Everlasting Hereafter. It is in the final end that they will be MEETING their Creator, Master and Sustainer.

Human beings are supposed to know, if they study the Qur'an that in this world, human beings are not the only effective agents of change or makers of history. There are transcendent beings playing their unseen roles, such as Allah SWT and His angels. Then there are invisible beings who are committed to do evil, Iblis and his hosts Satan and Jinns. Not all events in human life are due only to human acts and will power. There is the overarching and all-powerful will of Allah SWT. But He has made the world as the main playing field of human beings to carry out their God-given responsibilities of Servanthood, Stewardship/ Custodianship of the world and as Armies of God defending the Truth and opposing that which is False and Evil.

3. The futures thinking and planning of post-colonial Muslim nations.

It is unfortunate that Muslim nationalist thought and planning for the future of Muslim nations in the post-colonial era,

preferred to follow the secular model and ideology of development and modernity implemented by the technologically advanced Western or Eastern nations in the post war era. During the colonial period, the Islamic reformist and revivalist thinkers and intellectuals had articulated a vision of the Muslim future in which Muslims would be completely liberated from the false secular models of independence, progress and modernity. the Islamic *da`wah* movements of the 1970s strongly supported the reformist and renewalist models in opposition to the nationalist narratives of development and progress. But the dominance of the nationalist movements prevailed in the post-colonial period to marginalise the reformist futuristic visions. However, with the advent of the 21st century, the weaknesses of the conventional models of progress and modernity are being exposed and once again Muslim nationalist leaders are being urged by the reformist Islamic intellectuals to abandon the secular models and reconsider adopting the alternative paradigm of holistic development and progress as envisioned in the Qur'an.

4. Some Predictions of World-Bound Futures Studies

On the basis of their respective worldviews, dominant discourses and narratives western nations continue to plan for their preferred futures – all of which are conceived within the framework of worldly, profane and secular visions of the future. Some nations are finding that Happiness is the better goal of national development than Progress or GDP, following Bhutan

which declared its faith in Gross National Happiness instead of GDP as an indicator of Progress. Since then, there is now the World Happiness Index and World Happiness Ranking, issued by the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network and there is also the International Happiness Day. In the 2021 World Happiness Ranking Malaysia stands at 81th place, which is among the top ranking of happy nations.

The New Scientist journal produced in USA now takes the whole of humanity to greater heights, extending the future of the world beyond 2050 to reach 2076.

1. The world in 2076: Machines outsmart us but we're still on top
2. The world in 2076: The theory of everything is here – we think
3. The world in 2076: Human-made life forms walk the earth
4. The world in 2076: Thousands of people have settled on Mars ([We've seen the future, and it will blow your mind | New Scientist https://www.newscientist.com > round-up > world-2076](https://www.newscientist.com > round-up > world-2076))

In Jun 23, 20202, The *World Economic Forum* came up with 17 technology predictions for 2025, which is constitutes an optimistic and plausible future as far as global technological advancement is concerned. The predictions are as follows:

1. AI-optimized manufacturing

2. A far-reaching energy transformation

- 3. A new era of computing**
- 4. Healthcare paradigm shift to prevention through diet**
- 5. 5G will enhance the global economy and save lives**
- 6. A new normal in managing cancer**
- 7. Robotic retail**
- 8. A blurring of physical and virtual spaces**
- 9. Putting individuals - not institutions - at the heart of healthcare**
- 10. The future of construction has already begun**
- 11. Gigaton-scale CO2 removal will help to reverse climate change**
- 12. A new era in medicine**
- 13. Closing the wealth gap**
- 14. A clean energy revolution supported by digital twins**
- 15. Understanding the microscopic secrets hidden on surfaces**
- 16. Machine learning and AI expedite decarbonization in carbon-heavy industries**
- 17. Privacy is pervasive – and prioritized**

(<https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/06/17-predictions-for-our-world-in-2025/>)

5. Conclusion: Another Future of Future Studies

Despite the obvious differences between the Islamic perspective on futures, and mainstream futures studies which do not take into account transcendent or supra-natural variables in

human lives and human futures, Islamic worldview-based futures studies can and should benefit from some of the useful methods and approaches developed particularly by Ziauddin Sardar and his group of futurists and Sohail Inayatullah and his colleagues, such as Complexity, Extended Present Scenarios, Casual Layered Analysis, Futures Triangle, Trend Analysis, Environmental Scanning, Visioning, Indicators, The Six Pillars, Simulation and Modelling, Scenario Planning, Emerging Trends, Postnormal Times, Unthought Futures Scenarios, Metaphors, "Black Swans", "Black Jelly Fish", Backcasting, etc.

Islamic worldview-based futures studies should address the failings and weaknesses in the futures thinking and planning of Muslim nations, by showing how they have deviated from the approaches and methodologies provided by Divine wisdom and Divine revelation. The COVID 19 pandemic, the SDGs, the climate emergencies, the uncertainties, calamities and turbulence of the near future are opportunities for proponents of Islamic worldview-based futures studies to open the eyes of lost humanity and forgetful Muslim nations as well to the realities and true promises of the ultimate futures contained in the grand, richer and truer narratives of *al-Ākhirah*, *Yaum al-Dīn* and the *Liqā' Allāh*.

Now that IIUM has a UNESCO Chair for Future Studies in the person of Prof. Sohail Inayatullah, in addition to the Futures Studies Unit in the KIRKHS, while USIM has its own Futures Studies programme, it is possible to envisage the formation of a Malaysian Islamic Worldview-Based Future Studies (MIWBFS)

which develop the Islamic Paradigm of Futures Studies. This Paradigm, when fully developed, could be the game changer as other conventional schools fail to recognise that history does not stop in the world but extends to another realm of existence, the *ĀKHIRAH*, and – worse still – fail to recognise the existence and authority of One True God, Allah SWT in His world and His Cosmos.

It is my hope that the MIWBFS school of thought will be able to initiate and create new areas of future studies such as; a) the study of spiritual futures of man; b) Islamic eschatological implications on worldly planning; c) religious eschatologies as a domain of futures studies; d) Qur'anic perspective on role of Satanic forces in influencing human behaviour; e) comparative futures vision from religious scriptures of world religions; f) islamic critique of western futures studies; g) islamic critique of Muslim futures planning in the past and the present; and h) futures planning upto 2077 C.E. which coincides with the advent of the 16th century *Hijriyyah* – the dawn of the *Ummah Wasa'at* to play the role of Witnesses (*Shuhadā'*) unto mankind as far as Justice (*al-'Adl*), Moral Excellence (*al-Khairiyyah*) and Proper Existential Balance (*al-Tawāzun bain al-Ifrāṭ wa't-Tafriṭ, I`tidāl*) are concerned.

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