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Inclusive Muslim partnership with China transcends history into new era

By Md Moniruzzaman

In its endeavor for a global community of shared future, China over the years has brought the world the **Belt and Road Initiative**, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization mechanisms and the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation among others. The Muslim countries have great potential for inclusive cooperation in the mechanisms.

An ineluctable inclusiveness is emerging in China's BRI economic projects that can encompass all the Muslim economies in Asia. Indeed Chinese President Xi Jinping happened to unveil both the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Maritime Silk Road in Muslim countries, the first in Kazakhstan in September 2013, and the other in October 2013 in Indonesia with the world's largest single-nation Muslim population.

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On regionalism, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization has been fostering a closer tie between China and the regional Muslim countries. It is believed by some that in the wake of growing unilateralism by the United States after the

end of the Cold War, SCO is an attempt to bring the Far East and Central Asia together for lasting stability and peace.

Therefore, while maintaining traditional relations with the West, the Muslim countries may find SCO more attractive to increase their collective power for global balance.

And on globalism, the Chinese-led BRICS initiative as well as the China-Africa cooperation agenda to represent the global East and South cannot bypass the vast majority of Muslim economies, people and societies that fall within the arena.

If BRICS is taken to represent an Eastward movement of civilizational cycle from the West, the Muslim world is bound to march with BRICS due to geographical and civilizational proximities.

Throughout history, the Muslim world has been partnering with China for mutual development not only of each other, but also of Europe and Africa. Today, the Muslim economies are already a great source of the rejuvenating China.

Apart from China's ever increasing trade deals, China depends heavily for gas and petroleum on Muslim countries in the Arab peninsula, Iran and Central Asia. The South and Southeast Asian Muslim countries are also huge raw material suppliers as well as markets for Chinese industrial products. The dependence on these countries is also balanced by increasing Chinese investment in those economies as well.

In return, Chinese policies on foreign aid and exchange are generally dominated by partnership, political equality, and win-win cooperation in contrast with the Western policies of conditionalities and imposition of sanctions on countries like Iran, Sudan and Syria on political grounds.

The Christian West tends to treat its relation with the Muslim world in terms of civilizational conflict, while China looks at such relations from cooperation perspective. Therefore, China's relations are based on non-intervention in domestic affairs, an approach that makes it more popular and acceptable in the Muslim countries as a reliable partner for development and friendship.

However, the Muslim world is now more divided over the role of the West due to the latter's successive devastation of Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, Syria and Yemen, and continuous denial of emancipation from Western-backed authoritarianism and a solution to Israeli occupation of Palestine.

For political stability the Muslim world is in search of a more reliable partner. If the civilizational cycle of the past two and a half millennia is to renew, then it is logical that the next civilizational candidate is China which needs supporting sojourners. The Muslim world being a giant neighbor makes it imperative for China to develop intimate partnership.

All these and other indicators only strengthen the age-old China-Muslim world inter-acquaintance and relationship further. In the contemporary time, China as a leading power in the eastward shift of civilizational cycle is acquiring trust of the Muslim countries for being non-interventionist in their domestic affairs.

Clearly, the Muslim world might increasingly find China as a reliable partner in both development and politics. If the present trend continues, then the durable tradition of Islamic-Confucian bonds and a greater partnership building will apparently be more plausible for each other's interests.

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Reflecting on the BRICS philosophy, China and the Muslim countries have more reasons to develop an ever engaging civilizational partnership for the future global peace and prosperity.

Given the geographical landmass that the Muslim world occupies in the global East/South, a closer partnership between China and the Muslim economies is rather indispensable to realize a global community of shared interests during the shift of global vicissitudes that is to take place in the future.

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