

**P. Kalra** 

University of Cambridge, Jesus Lane, United Kingdom, Cambridge

e-mail: pk315@cam.ac.uk

**EURASIA'S PEACE-MAKING POWER FOR ISLAM**

There is a growing need to spread the idea of Islam as a peaceful religion and Muslim countries as partners for global peace. The Eurasian worldview which encompasses a multi-ethnic character and diversity best showcases the essential role that it can and has played and continues to play with and for the Islamic world globally. Geography and demography have given the region a unique character that lends itself to a particular understanding of the world and its various elements. The geography makes it part of the Eastern and Western civilizations which in addition with a shared history allows a special perspective to come through. In popular imagination today the world is divided between the East and West and Muslims against the rest of the world which is not part of the worldview of a majority of Eurasian societies. In this increasingly divisive environment which is causing dangerous splits and ruptures around the globe, the partnership between Islam and Eurasia is both necessary and integral for peace and stability in the world. The historical place of Eurasian countries and their closeness with the Muslim world allows for an approach beyond othering and appeals to the greater good. As part of the fabric of the Asian and Muslim world the region as a whole is heir to a social and cultural milieu which is accommodating and inclusive. This gives rise to partnerships not divisions and creates proximity not distance with Muslim communities around the world. This paper provides the background and historicity of examples of interactions between Eurasian countries with the Islamic world both within and without and takes a long term view of history to showcase the consistent role that countries in the region have played and continues to play in mitigating conflicts with the Islamic world. It specifically considers political and economic relationships with a cross-section of Muslim societies around the world, majority or otherwise. It offers instances where these countries have played the role of mediator in conflicts in the post-Soviet space and particularly in the Middle East, and gives further examples where Eurasia's track record and nuanced approach through time can provide solutions and resolutions in the future.

**Key words:** Eurasia, Central Asia, Islam.

П. Калра

Кембридж университеті, Джейсус Лейн, Ұлыбритания, Кембридж қ.

e-mail: pk315@cam.ac.uk

**Еуразияның ислам үшін бейбітшілік орнатушы күші**

Исламды бейбіт дін ретінде, ал мұсылман елдерін жаһандық бейбітшілік үшін серіктес ретінде таратудың қажеттілігі артып келеді. Көпэтникалық сипат пен әртүрлілікті қамтитын еуразиялық дүниетаным оның жаһандық деңгейде ислам әлемімен ойнай алатын маңызды рөлін жақсы көрсетеді. География мен демография аймаққа әлемді және оның әртүрлі элементтерін белгілі бір түсінуге мүмкіндік беретін ерекше сипат берді. География оны Шығыс және Батыс өркениеттерінің бір бөлігі етеді, бұл ортақ тарихқа қосымша ерекше перспективаға мүмкіндік береді. Бүгінгі таңда танымал елестетуде әлем Шығыс пен Батыс және мұсылмандар әлемнің қалған бөлігіне қарсы бөлінген, бұл еуразиялық қоғамдардың көпшілігінің дүниетанымының бөлігі емес. Дүние жүзінде қауіпті жік-жікке және ыдырауға әкеліп соғатын осы барған сайын алауыздық жағдайында Ислам мен Еуразия арасындағы серіктестік әлемдегі бейбітшілік пен тұрақтылық үшін қажет әрі ажырамас. Еуразия елдерінің Азиядағы тарихи орны және олардың мұсылман әлемімен жақындығы басқалардан тыс көзқарасқа және үлкен игілікке шақыруға мүмкіндік береді. Азия және мұсылман әлемінің құрылымының бір бөлігі ретінде аймақ тұтастай алғанда ыңғайлы және инклюзивті әлеуметтік және мәдени ортаның мұрагері болып табылады. Бұл бөліну емес, серіктестік туғызады және дүние жүзіндегі мұсылман қауымдарымен арақашықтық емес, жақындық тудырады. Үшінші дүниежүзілік соғыс туралы келіссөздер кезінде, не сөзсіз, не қазірдің өзінде жүріп жатқан кезде, еуразиялық елдердің дүние жүзіндегі мұсылмандармен орнатқан сансыз қарым-қатынасы шешім табуға және келіспеушіліктерді азайтуға көмектеседі. Жаһандану және мультикультурализм бүгінде эксклюзивтілік, оқшаулану және протекционизм саясатының салдарынан қауіп төніп тұр, әсіресе бүкіл әлемдегі мұсылман халықтарына қатысты.

Дүние жүзінде бейбітшілікті қамтамасыз ету үшін бұл мәселені мұқият шешу керек. Бұл жұмыс еуразиялық елдердің ислам әлемімен ішіндегі және сыртындағы өзара әрекеттесу мысалдарының негізі мен тарихын береді және аймақтағы елдермен қақтығыстарды жеңілдетуде атқарған және ойнап жатқан тұрақты рөлді көрсету үшін тарихқа ұзақ мерзімді көзқарасты ұсынады. Ол дүние жүзіндегі мұсылман қоғамдарының көпшілігімен немесе басқа жолмен саяси және экономикалық қатынастарды арнайы қарастырады. Ол осы елдердің посткеңестік кеңістіктегі және әсіресе Таяу Шығыстағы қақтығыстарда делдал рөлін атқарған жағдайларды ұсынады және Еуразияның уақыт бойынша тәжірибесі мен нюансты көзқарасы болашақта шешімдерді қамтамасыз ете алатын қосымша мысалдар береді.

**Түйін сөздер:** Еуразия, Орталық Азия, Ислам.

П. Калра

Кембриджский университет, Иисус Лейн, Великобритания, г. Кембридж  
e-mail: pk315@cam.ac.uk

### **Миротворческая сила Евразии в исламском мире**

Растет потребность в распространении идеи ислама как мирной религии и мусульманских стран как партнеров для глобального мира. Евразийское мировоззрение, которое включает в себя многоэтнический характер и разнообразие, лучше всего демонстрирует ту важную роль, которую играло и продолжает играть в и для исламского мира во всем мире. География и демография придали региону уникальный характер, способствующий особому пониманию мира и его различных элементов. География делает его частью восточной и западной цивилизаций, что в дополнение к общей истории позволяет увидеть особую перспективу. В народном воображении сегодня мир поделен между Востоком и Западом и мусульманами против остального мира, что не является частью мировоззрения большинства евразийских обществ. В этой все более разобщающей среде, которая вызывает опасные расколы и разногласия по всему миру, партнерство между исламом и Евразией является необходимым и неотъемлемым элементом мира и стабильности во всем мире. Историческое место евразийских стран в Азии и их близость к мусульманскому миру позволяет выйти за пределы инаковости и апеллирует к высшему благу. Являясь частью азиатского и мусульманского мира, регион в целом является наследником социальной и культурной среды, которая является гостеприимной и инклюзивной. Это порождает партнерские отношения, а не разногласия, и создает близость, а не дистанцию с мусульманскими общинами по всему миру. Учитывая разговоры о Третьей мировой войне, которые либо неизбежны, либо уже происходят, множество отношений, которые евразийские страны поддерживают с мусульманами по всему миру, могут помочь в поиске решений и смягчении разногласий. Глобализация и мультикультурализм сегодня находятся под угрозой из-за политики исключительности, изоляционизма и протекционизма, особенно в отношении мусульманского населения во всем мире. Их необходимо решать с готовностью, чтобы обеспечить мир во всем мире. В этой статье представлены предыстория и историчность примеров взаимодействия евразийских стран с исламским миром как внутри, так и за его пределами, а также представлен долгосрочный взгляд на историю, чтобы продемонстрировать последовательную роль, которую страны региона играли и продолжают играть в смягчении конфликтов с исламским миром. В статье рассматриваются политические и экономические отношения с различными мусульманскими обществами по всему миру. Приводятся примеры, когда эти страны играли роль посредников в конфликтах на постсоветском пространстве и, в частности, на Ближнем Востоке, и приводятся дополнительные примеры, когда послушной список Евразии и тонкий подход во времени могут обеспечить решения в будущем.

**Ключевые слова:** Евразия, Средняя Азия, Ислам.

### **Introduction**

The Cold War has ended but it continues to cast a long shadow on international relations in the present day. With the collapse of the Soviet Union came the end of communism but also a number of sovereign Muslim countries – Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbeki-

stan – which has changed the landscape of global politics. An increase in the number of Muslim countries in the world in the 1990s led to a number of new possible coalitions and alliances (pan-Turkism, Iran-Tajikistan, Arabs-Central Asia) but also competition for influence along divisions within the Islamic world. Russia's debacle in Afghanistan as part of the Soviet Union is a lesson worth heeding for the

rest of the world community. Russia still occupies an important place in the post-Soviet space and has experience and knowledge of many of the conflicts which exist within these newly independent countries in Central Asia and the Caucasus region. The shared Soviet legacy and historical experience of the seventy years give Russia, more than any other country either in the Muslim world or beyond, the tools to be able to play mediator for conflict resolution. In many ways some of the religious tensions in the post-Soviet space were engineered by Soviet nationalist policies, something which Russia has personal experience of as well. There is no denying the number of trouble spots in international conflicts which exist along the faultlines of the Islamic world. Tensions with the European Union and the U.S. are also on the rise with the Muslims within and without being perceived as threats and viewed with suspicion. The rifts arising out of these conflicts are turning into far larger military engagements than was previously seen. Eurasia's longstanding and continued political, economic, and military relationship with the bulk of the Islamic world can help direct, coordinate, and construct modes of reconciliation and "...help in preventing differences between the Islamic and Western worlds from evolving into major international crises." (Kremenjuk 1994, 111)

Russia, China, and the Islamic world continue to be viewed in much the same way and the old Orientalist attitudes of Western Europe remain part of the lexicon. Eurasia revisited through its unique trajectory over centuries offers an opportunity to move away from the old dichotomies of us vs them, Muslims vs Christians, and so on. Eurasia can serve as an example and model for what can be achieved when faced with the opportunity to transform. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia and countries in Eurasia shed their ideological constraints and moved into a new world order where they had to view the world in fundamentally different ways. Eurasian responses to their external environment guided by their internal composition and history inform their interactions abroad and at home. The Muslim world is both inside and outside Eurasia and all the countries in the region navigate the differences and multiplicities accordingly. Islam is not a single entity and Muslims do not have one voice, this above all is accepted and understood in Eurasia because of its make-up and the long-standing, extensive and expansive interactions with this part of the world. The Eurasian landscape has been "... neighbors, partners in trading, occasional collaborators in raids, and spouses" with Muslims through the

ages (Reynolds 2014, 192). This informs and guides the roles and interactions of and between Muslims in Eurasia. Before European hegemony, imperialism and colonialism, it was the formidable Muslim Empires and civilizations of China and Persia that were the drivers and actors of the world order that was represented by several poles, ideas, cultures and economic systems.

## Results and Discussion

### *Eurasia*

Eurasia is the landmass through which the ancient and historic Silk Road(s) passes. It has been home to merchants from across the Eurasian expanse from China, India, Central Asia, Arabs and Persians, Russia to the shores of Italy. The number of Muslim communities and states across Eurasia are plentiful and form a large part of the Muslim population worldwide. Muslim communities have historically played formidable roles in the Eurasian landscape and continue to be major players in the region, with both natural and human resources. The Silk Road(s) passing through Eurasia, most popularly connected to China in the east and Italy in the West, *should not* and *cannot* be imagined without the presence of Muslim merchants and communities in the heartland of Asia, the Persian Gulf, the Arab Middle East, North Africa, India and Rus(sia). Contacts between the populations of Rus and Islamic empires and states stretch back to pre-medieval times. Numismatic and archaeological evidence points to merchants from Rus traveling the Silk Road(s) in the 6-7<sup>th</sup> centuries. Islamic sources from the 10<sup>th</sup> century onwards mention merchants from Rus and Volga Bulgars selling furs and slaves to Islamic merchants. Famous Islamic scholars like Ibn Haldun, Ibn Rusta, and Gardizi have left accounts describing merchants and commodities from Rus in Baghdad and other markets, especially in the Abbasid Caliphate (Noonan 1998, 153-4, II). There was a significant amount of international trade through the North Caucasus and the Caspian which connected Russia and the Abbasid Caliphate, so much so that, "...significant changes in the Baltic, European Russia, the Caucasus and the Islamic world starting in the second half of the eighth century made possible the great trade linking these diverse regions." (Noonan 1998, vii, I) Numismatic evidence of *dirham* coins found in parts of Russia can be attributed to the bulk of the Islamic world: Iraq, Northern Africa, Northern Iran, Southern Caucasus, Khurasan,

upper Iraq, Transoxiana, Southern Iran, Arabia and Syria (Noonan 1998, 156, IV). In the 13<sup>th</sup> century with the advent of the Mongols, Eurasia saw a further burgeoning of trade and connectivity under the auspices of the Chinggisid Khans. Merchants from Rus had access to all Mongol lands that stretched from the Middle East, Persia, Central Asia, and China as part of the Golden Horde. There was a constant flow of goods, peoples, and ideas in Mongol Eurasia, engineered and driven by Mongol Khans and their establishment of infrastructure across the geographical landscape of Eurasia. The subsequent successor states of the Golden Horde, namely Astrakhan, Crimea, Kazan, Siberia, and Qazak Khanates (Frank 2016, 139), became part of Imperial Russia over time and defined the multicultural ethnic composition of Russia palpable even today. Trade was alive and well between Caffa and Rus through to Ottoman Turkey in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. In the 15-16<sup>th</sup> centuries, Ottoman Turkey imported furs from Muscovy; and Muscovite princes gave the Sultan favorable treatment. From "...Mehmed II's time merchants from Muscovy were engaged in trade with Ottoman territories; and settled in Ottoman ports of Azov and Caffa." (Inalcik 1994, 278) The volume of trade was reportedly quite large and the Ottomans had access to markets in Muscovy filled with goods from other parts of Europe including metals and textiles as well as goods from the Northern forests and other parts of the Silk Road(s) (Inalcik 1994, 283). Russia's role as an interlocutor in the Eurasian space is evident even in 1667 when a treaty concluded between Tsar Aleksey Mihaylovich and an Armenian commercial company to pass through Northern Russia to engage with Iran's silk trade (Inalcik 1994, 504). By the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Tsarist Russia was able to bring Muslims within its borders in closer contact with Muslims abroad due to the growth of railway and steamship navigation. There were also special directorates and facilities prepared for Muslim subjects of Russia to go on *hajj* with pilgrims from Afghanistan, China, India, and Persia (Crews 2014, 46-7; See also E. Kane 2010).

Other than trade and the growth of vibrant and flourishing Muslim commercial activities in Russia, under Catherine the Great, there was also "... the formal recognition of Islamic institutions by the Imperial Russian government..." (Frank 2001, 1). Catherine II's policies in the 18<sup>th</sup> century led to good relations with both the *ulama* and the general population. One of her first legislations was to shut down the Office of New Converts' Affairs and she convened a Legislative Commission that had many

Muslim delegates in 1767. Her reign saw the imperial construction of mosques and religious institutions (Inalcik 1994, 504). In 1788 Catherine created the *Muftiat*, 'Mohammedan Spiritual Assembly', in Orenburg and by 1831 three others in Crimea. She also established *Sunni* and *Shi'a* assemblies in the Transcaucasus region which were akin to the *Ilmiye* in Ottoman Turkey and served as a model for later Soviet Spiritual Directorates (Akiner 1986, 9). The *Muftiat* organized the *ulama*, standardized Muslim education, printed Islamic books which led to a rise in printing, and maintained religious buildings and institutions. All through the 19<sup>th</sup> century "...trade remained in the hands of Russia's Muslim subjects ..." (Frank 2001, 1) and world-famous centers of Islamic learning and commercial centers, *madrassas* of Hussainiya in Orenberg, Mukhhammediya in Kazan, Galiya in Ufa, Izh Bobi, Troitsk and Kargala, among others abounded. These centers were marked for their "... prominent, innovative and far-sighted..." thought all over the Islamic world (Bukharaev 2000, 304). Later, in 1905, Russia's Decree on Religious Tolerance furthered the status of Muslims in the empire (Rorlich 2004, 41).

In general, the conditions of Muslims were far more favorable in the Russian Empire than the British Empire at the time with Muslims exempt from military service, poll tax, and corporal punishment in Imperial Russia (Akiner 1986, 10; Frank 2016, 139). As a result of institutional and juridical structures Russian Muslims (Muslim Cossacks on the steppe, Turkmen sailors on the Caspian, merchants, Bashkirs in Urals, populations in Samarkand among others) were able to forge a relationship with the Russian state and "...reinforced the stability of the empire and shaped the possibilities of being a Russian Muslim, both within and without its borders." (Crews 2014, p. 52) Later, in the Soviet Union a no less multicultural and ethnic milieu continued along with close contacts and relations with the Islamic world, near and far. There were four spiritual directorates in the Soviet Union that represented the administration of Islam. The most significant of these were in Central Asia and Kazakhstan (Akiner 1986, 11). In Russia today, the Volga, North Caucasus regions and Tatarstan regions represent large Muslim populations with different levels of autonomous relationships with the center. To summarise, Eurasia, denoted by Russia, Central Asia, Caucasus, and the territory of the former Soviet Union has offered a space for multiple interactions between a diverse set of people, especially for Muslims in neighboring Central Asia, Iran, or the Arab Middle East. It has

consistently stimulated the possibilities and potential within the Eurasian space and driven commercial activity with the Muslim world. By minimizing perceived differences with the Islamic world, empires, and states, the region's contribution to security and wealth is unparalleled. The next section considers Russia's Eurasian identity.

### *Eurasian Russia*

A large part of Russian territory is in Asia making it a uniquely Eurasian state. With the exception of the period since 1991, Russia has been connected in one form or another with the rest of Asia for most of its history. Whether it was relationships with the Abbassid Caliphate, the Golden Horde (Mongol Empire), Central Asian Khanates (Khiva, Kokand, Astrakhan; later Bukhara, Khiva, Kazakh Khanates) and modern Central Asia and Caucasus, Russia has been part of or close to Muslim Asia. Muslims have been part of the very fabric of society within Russia and have played a more than a substantial role in determining Russia's external environment. Any discussion of Eurasia or *Eurasianism*, is incomplete without a note on Lev Gumilev, a Soviet scholar and intellectual, who put forth the theory of Eurasianism in the Soviet period in the 1960-70s. He has been variously referred to as a geographer, archaeologist, ethnologist, medievalist, and orientalist. He was not the first one to coin the term, however, his views continue to influence and inform the current political leadership in Russia. Presidents Putin and Nazarbaev have both openly acknowledged that their vision of Eurasia and the Eurasian Economic Union is influenced by Gumilev's ideas. At least three strands of Eurasianism can be traced in Russia: one, Eurasianism of the 1920s after the civil war in Russia; two, Gumilev's theory of ethnogenesis and Eurasia; and three, neo-Eurasianism which has been in vogue in the 1990s and some would argue has led to the establishment of the Eurasian Economic Union. They are all theories of Russian nationalism aimed to understand the history of Russia. In particular, Gumilev's Eurasianism focuses on the multi-ethnic character of the Russian population which he calls a combination of Slavs, Finno-Ugric tribes and Tatars. He focuses on the unique geographical, climactic and topographical character of Eurasia which he considers as determining Russian history. He refers to the different characteristics of the Russian ethnos as a kind of *superethnos* that led to a distinct historical trajectory. These elements put together paint a vivid picture of Russia today and al-

low for a far more intricate depiction of the disparate elements and the ways in which they come together to comprise the population and the political thought of Russia. According to Eurasianists in the 19th century like N.S. Trubetskoi, G.V. Floro, Roman Jakobson, and George Ver, Russia belonged not to Western Europe alone but to Eurasia, the region that geographically, ethnically, linguistically, and historically constituted a separate whole. Furthermore, according to Savitsky, Russia occupies the place between east-west and north-south which he calls the 'Eurasian Junction' (Savitsky 1993; Savitsky 1997; Glebov 2005). Within this context, we can begin to connect and inform the understanding of Russia in the past and bring into focus its *Eurasianness*. This understanding provides the basis for Russia's interactions with the Islamic world and shows how those interactions form a continuum that dates back centuries.

Russia's Eurasian footprint is also discussed by modern scholars like David Christian who presents Russia and the Soviet Union as part of Inner Eurasia and *a single, coherent historical unit* (Christian 1994, p. 175). This allows us to apply a longer lens on the environment which is inhabited by Russia and present day Central Asia and bring coherence to its presence in the wider region. His argument offers an understanding of political, climactic, and geographical Eurasia. Historically, these lands have been the nodes through which peoples, commodities, ideas, religions and diseases have travelled and as a result "...the political history of Inner Eurasia shaped the rhythms... of the entire Eurasian region." (Christian 1994, p. 182) This places Eurasia at the very center of the interactions with the Islamic world, both as a part of it and as a facilitator of contact with it. Eurasia, of the past and present, endeavors to keep the region accessible for the growth and productivity of East-West interactions. The Eurasian Economic Union is a revival of a *world sans borders* which is uniquely Eurasian and part of the very fabric of the countries in the region. It is of no surprise then to find the Silk Road(s) in this region meandering through the heart of Eurasia. The oldest and most famous traders in the world are Muslim merchants be it Sogdian, Bukharan, Arab, and Persian. It was Muslim societies and markets in the 8<sup>th</sup> century that spurred merchants from Rus and Volga Bulgars on to mercantile activity which brought prosperity and power along with it to Muscovy. A Eurasian world-view generated with this in mind can help inform understandings and instil meanings in relationships with the wider Islamic world the particularities of

which may differ in time but the core values of interaction continue to be diplomatic and economic in nature. This is not lost on the political leadership of all countries of Eurasia including Russia today and is easily identifiable in their interactions abroad.

### *Eurasian Shared Space*

There is a growing understanding especially in response to world politics today that we live in an interconnected world and while a global perspective includes a much wider region, the Eurasian region is a microcosm of that same process and is inhabited by the majority of the world's population. Eurasian countries have relations with *difficult* Islamic states speak to these aspects. Continued relations with Iran despite its religious leanings and economic ties with the Persian Gulf point to a complex understanding of how inter-civilization dialogue and interaction is necessary in the region. The presence of the Caspian Sea which is shared by Iran, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan means that this shared space, geographically part of the Islamic world, exerts its own pressure on all the economies in Eurasia. The 2008 financial crisis and the subsequent economic difficulties which spread like wildfire across the globe, and the more recent Anglo-American shifts away from globalization have left a turbulent feeling in the world order. Whether it is globalization and/or multiculturalism the tide has turned towards Asia. In 2010 Merkel, Cameron, and Sarkozy talked of the negative tide of multiculturalism and spoke of the problems of European cosmopolitanism, while Medvedev 2011 tried to rehabilitate the term and bring its positive aspects to the fore (Pain 2013, 168). Similarly, while the Brexit vote of 2017 led Britain away from the European Union; Eurasian countries continue to find ways to connect. There is a definite trend away from globalization in the U.S. and Western Europe which is limiting migration and acting more and more protectionist. Many Eurasian countries, including Russia, occupy the same space as many of the countries of the Islamic world and with their own domestic Muslim populations can provide a better understanding and platform for interaction which mitigates the *othering* of Islamic communities. In other words, Eurasian countries can create the conditions to step away from the kind of thinking which alienates the Muslims.

The adjectives most closely associated with the East continue to be words like *mysterious* and *dangerous* which evoke distance and unfamiliarity even for people who inhabit the region. As inhabitants of

a shared physical geography in the form of Eurasia, the Islamic world is not the 'other' and Muslims in turn don't represent something alien and unrecognizable in this region. In addition to the Muslim-majority countries of Central Asia and the Caucasus, Muslims also are also a part of the Russian worldview for many centuries. Throughout history, Muslims have traversed Russian lands, have been subjects of the Russian Empire, then the Soviet Union, and are present as citizens and neighbors today. There is a long and expansive relationship shared between present-day Russia and Muslim communities across the globe. Russia represents one of the oldest multicultural societies in the world and it is guided by internal as much as external factors when interacting with the wider Islamic world. Economic relations with the Islamic world have formed a large part of Russia's relationship with the countries of the Middle East, North Africa, South Asia, Southeast Asia and beyond. Furthermore, there has been a concerted effort from the Russian government to solidify its relations with the Islamic world since the collapse of the Soviet Union. The plurality of Russia's relations with the Islamic world signifies its commitment to be inclusive and reflects its attempts at engaging with the wider international arena. Since the 1990s it has consistently become part of a number of organizations and signed treaties with a number of Muslim countries around the world. The Soviet period has left its footprint on the larger theoretical framework and particular experience of Russia's external policies, be it Afghanistan or relations with Pakistan, Syria, and Arab countries. They serve as concrete examples of lost opportunities and lessons in international behavior.

The place of Russia in the Islamic world was recently made even more poignant, in the 2015 Turkey-Russia jet debacle, it was neighboring Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan which quickly helped mitigate the situation to minimize tensions in the region (Putz 2016). Russia's close relationship with the countries of Central Asia and the Caucasus helped mitigate regional tensions in this case. Furthermore, Turkey, Iran, and Saudi Arabia were all touted as competitors to Russian influence and interest in Central Asia and the Caucasus, however, this has proven otherwise and diplomatic relations with all countries have led to an easing of tensions rather than escalation. Russia's relationship with the Orient and the Islamic world is far more varied than its Western European counterparts. Russia's past includes being part of the East as well as being an imperial power. As mentioned above, the ethnic composition of Rus-

sia reflects its past contacts and interactions with the people of the East and the Muslim world. Not only can Russia help mitigate problems with Europe but even within the Muslim world there are divisions between Saudi-led Muslim countries and countries that fall under the purview of Iran. These divisions can be minimized with the active role of Russia which enjoys diplomatic relations with Saudi Arabia and Iran. Putin's trip to Saudi Arabia in 2007 was a clear signal to Saudi Arabia that Russia was not partnering with Iran against the Sunni kingdom (Nizameddin 2013, 246). According to Saikal, Russia's foreign policy in Central Asia and the Middle East has "... a clear eye on the need to lay the foundations for a long-term...policy." (Saikal 1995, 281) Within this context, Russia's Minister for Foreign Affairs, Sergei Lavrov has put forth '*network diplomacy*' which focuses on the lack of ideological constraints on Russian foreign policy and allows for flexible alliances (Bacon 2014, 212). Most importantly, the challenges that the Islamic countries face are similar to the ones faced by Russia. The curse of energy resources or the *Dutch disease* common to a lot of countries in the Islamic world is applicable to Russia as well. There is more in common between Russia and oil-rich countries of the Middle East and farther afield Indonesia and Malaysia as well. In 2007 Saudi Arabia and Russia as major oil exporters considered maintaining oil prices as a common interest, especially in light of the highly unstable region they inhabit (Nizameddin 2013, 247). "Whereas energy has been the central pillar in Russian economic growth for the last ten years, it over-dependency on this sectoral dimension has rendered Moscow hostage to international market prices and to its assessments of its engagement as a producer, consumer and transit country." (Freier 2012, 261) In addition, radical Islamists within their borders, a strong state and a strong leader, along with having suffered under U.S.-led sanctions; all allow Russia a far better understanding of the Muslim world than its other Western counterparts. Russia's role in many ways amounts to being an insider and an outsider simultaneously, echoing its Eurasian character and its geographical location, which imbues its actions.

### Conclusion

In international relations, a relationship that mutually benefits all parties is more attractive and stable. Looking beyond *realpolitik*, Eurasia offers a formidable example of the advantages of coopera-

tion above the competition. The natural connectedness of the Eurasian space brings to the fore centuries-long interactions which have allowed disparate cultures and peoples to live together and is a model for development which dates back to a time before European colonialism and imperialism. Russia's unique position and array of relationships, past and present, with the bulk of the Muslim world is in tune with the rhythms of globalization today. A Eurasian perspective is essential in order to bring understanding via a closer look at the ways and means through which countries in the region with diverse populations, ethnicities, religious affiliations, customs and tradition, have overcome obstacles and found convergences (Kalra 2018). Processes of globalization have seen a sea change in the last decade and continue to inform and influence the world order. A rapidly growing Eurasia is poised to change the balance of world powers. Eurasia represents an accommodation of multiple cultures, ideas, and aspirations within and without its borders and promotes multilateral decision-making. Eurasian countries and the Islamic world represent each other in popular imagination which requires rethinking in order to ensure global security. Eurasian history can help provide solutions to the increased perceived divisiveness of the Muslim other. For too long, the U.S. and its allies have used divisions within the Islamic world and in Asia for their own benefits creating a world of mistrust and distance. Eurasia's multi-ethnic population and close relations with the Islamic world and other difficult powers in Asia give it the tools and the understanding to propel a far better understanding on both sides and apply a salve on the fissures which are fast enveloping global politics. This level of conflict and suspicion with Islam is to nobody's benefit and needs to be addressed objectively and with forethought. Eurasia can serve in this endeavor and prove a valuable partner and leader. The Islamic world represents alienness and separateness in Western European imagination whether because of its Muslimness or Asianness. This has increasingly caused rifts and fissures in the world leading to the notions of a Clash of Civilizations (Huntington (1997), Eurasian history and present offer an alternative to that kind of binary thought process and appeals to similarities, parallels, and counterparts so necessary for global security. With talks of World War III, either inevitable or already taking place, the myriad relationships that Eurasian countries have with Muslims around the world can help find solutions and mitigate differences. Globalization and multiculturalism are under threat today

because of policies of exclusiveness, isolationism, and protectionism especially with regard to Muslim populations around the world. These have to be addressed with alacrity in order to ensure world peace. Eurasia doesn't just serve as a bridge between the East and West, the region in reality forms a continuum flowing from the East into the West seamlessly as it holds both within its geographical expanse. Within this context, it is essential to point out the

importance of the Islamic world in Eurasia both historically and at present.

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