

Towards a sound forecasting of the cultural future of the Islamic world

د. محمد بريتن



Mohamed BRICH

*Ingénieur, Expert en études de prospective et de stratégie
Chercheur en pensée islamique et devenir du Monde Musulman*

**TOWARDS A SOUND FORECASTING
OF THE CULTURAL FUTURE OF THE
ISLAMIC WORLD**

November 1990

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

لِلْمُرْتَدِّينَ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ
وَالصَّلَاةِ وَالسَّلَامِ عَلَى خَاتَمِ النَّبِيَّاتِ وَالرُّسُلِ

وَقَرِّبْ رَبِّي إِلَيَّ

(طه: ١١٣)

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

أَقْرَأُ بِأَسْمَائِكَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ (١) خَلَقَ الْإِنْسَانَ مِنْ عَلَقٍ (٢)
 أَقْرَأُ بِأَسْمَائِكَ الْأَكْرَمِ (٣) الَّذِي عَلَّمَ بِالْقَلَمِ (٤) عَلَّمَ الْإِنْسَانَ
 مَا لَمْ يَعْلَمْ (٥)

(العلق: ١ - ٥)

وَاللَّهُ أَخْرَجَكُمْ مِنْ بُطُونِ أُمَّهَاتِكُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ شَيْئًا
 وَجَعَلَ لَكُمْ السَّمْعَ وَالْأَبْصَارَ وَالْأَفْئِدَةَ
 لَعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ (٧٨)

(النحل: ٧٨)

In the Name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful

Towards a sound forecasting of the cultural future of the Islamic World

1. Science as part of culture

In 1979, Europe and the West were shaken by an extremely violent and harshly worded Japanese challenge expressed by Konosuke Matsu Shita, president of the Japanese industrial electricity board and one of the prominent figures in Japanese economy.

He said in substance that Japan would undoubtedly succeed and the industrialized West would certainly fail for it carried the seeds of its own failure. He added that Western institutions had remained committed to Taylor's views and the danger lies in that their minds have also remained confined to Taylor's dogma! He added that for Westerners, ideal management consisted in distinguishing between the tasks of thinkers and those of workers, and that management was the art of conveying the ideas of the leaders to executive staff and workers.

He went on to add that the Japanese, for their part, had rejected Taylor's dogma and apprised themselves of the challenges of the future, attaching great importance to developing the intelligence of all workers. He added that the Japanese sought to promote the intelligence of all the members of society and continue the dialogue among all active elements so that they may work within a family spirit. Management thus consisted in mobilizing the intelligence of all in a project that will benefit all.⁽¹⁾

There have been countless reports, speeches and addresses which referred to this challenge. Many a book sought to stimulate European ambitions in order to give Europe a distinct position in the civilizational process.

We do not mean to praise Japan, for the Japanese developmental model is not applicable elsewhere. Rather, we mean to give an example of a country which is eager to keep up with progress through competition, inventiveness and creativity in all fields. Europe did take up the challenge; it confronted it with the necessary preparations and forecasting and concluded that the solution resided in culture, that

basic fabric which is instrumental for scientific research and development, the two pillars of cultural progress.

Europe realized the role of culture and education in the Japanese civilizational structure. It thus embarked on the implementation of scientific and technological programmes in the cultural and scientific fields, such as COST, EUREKA, REL (laboratories programme), ESF (European Science Foundation) programmes and FAST programme on forecasting the future of science and technology.⁽²⁾

These and similar programmes throughout the industrialized West raised the question of whether science was part of culture⁽³⁾; a fact that opened the way to forecasting the future of science and technology and the future of culture in general. It was realized that culture could not have a sound future without investigation of the future of science and its technological applications. Scientists became more vocal during the last decade in rebuking those attempting to separate science from culture and in condemning any research or project which was not based on the premise that science was an active part of culture.

Ilya Prigorine, Nobel Prize winner and author of many scientific studies and research works was one of them. In his book The New Alliance⁽⁴⁾, he indicated that it has become urgent for science to consider itself an integral part of the culture within which it has developed. He goes on to say that science will become universal when it ceases to deny the interests of society and stops considering itself alien to it. Only then will it be able to interact with people and respect peoples from diverse cultures.

Rene Maheu, former Director General of UNESCO, who had Dr. Al-Mandjra as deputy director for many years, was misunderstood by the UN bureaucracy. According to Dr. Al-Mandjra, had he been understood, we would have gained years of effort and saved millions of dollars through simply abandoning the illusion of the possibility of the transfer of technology. Maheu was the first to use the concept of endogenous development within a social and cultural context, particularly with respect to science⁽⁵⁾. Maheu provides a precise definition of development as he considers that development is science transferred into culture.

Dr. Al-Mandjra himself says that science may not be transferred as it is the product of a cultural pattern. Cultural values determine scientific thought, creativity and inventiveness. Hence, it is not possible to buy or transfer output without cultural input which makes it possible to understand, assimilate and enhance the value of what has been transferred. Otherwise you are simply purchasing gadgets.⁽⁶⁾

In this introduction, I stressed on the close relation between science and culture and the influence of each one of them on the other's present and future in order to indicate that any forecasting of the future of culture may not be carried out clearly and scientifically unless it is accompanied by forecasting the future of science and technology through applying science to the industrial, economic and social reality of society.

2. *What strategy and what forecast?*

At the end of 1978, the French ministry of culture carried out a study through the International Futuribles Society on forecasting the future of cultural development. The studies and discussions on the question "Which culture in the future?" led to the conclusion that there were two strategies of culture⁽⁷⁾:

Strategy of resignation:

This is a strategy in which the masses progressively forego any competition with the elite in the face of continuous changes within society and give up all attempts to control change. This strategy is likely to increase tension in the status quo and enhance the centralization of authority and administration in the hands of the elite. It drowns society under a flood of problems resulting from the negative and untreated effects of change. It confines decision making and the determination of alternatives in the hands of an isolated group of actors and decision makers.

Strategy of mobilization

Under this strategy all conscious minds in society are mobilized in order to attain a qualitative civilizational level. It aims at the actual participation of the individual in shaping his life, caring for his environment and society, contributing to self promotion and bearing positively on the development and reform of his society, thus making of the changes in society a natural process aimed at developing society instead of being a sort of frenzy which curbs and paralyzes society's potentialities. This strategy allows for the development of a kind of culture which makes it possible to move on from a society with a passive majority to a society with an active majority which states its problems, discusses them and participates in formulating reform programmes. Such a strategy permits a transition from reckless authority to conscious authority.

This study was selected in view of its accurate and diverse forecasting perspective. Any serious study for the elaboration of a cultural strategy in a society or nation requires for its implementation and adequacy, the existence of a democratic climate which crystallizes and activates the ideas and conceptions included in-- and recommended by-- that strategy.

Many cultural directorates in the Islamic World remained committed to the first strategy, namely the strategy of resignation. However, it has become necessary for all cultural institutions and directorates in the Islamic World to resort to the second model, the strategy of mobilization.

It is clear that the second model stimulates and induces potentials to move from a state of ambiguity, negative consumerism and rigidity of thought and creativity to a state of mobilization, collective inventiveness and participation in the process of change by all actors in social life in a way that would make it possible to develop society's structures in order to preserve its quality, strengthen its identity and relations and promote and develop its thought.

Such a strategy requires three elements:

- democracy in formulation and implementation;
- decentralization of operations;
- diversity of fields.

As such, this strategy may not be formulated by a centralized body or a specifically appointed agency to the exclusion of the various other sectors, including the private sector, associations and institutions. Alongside freedom and democracy, creativity requires diversity and multiplicity. Culture is creativity, reproduction and continuous giving through discovery and inventiveness; otherwise, there is no hope for continuity. It is one of God's laws that there is no mercy for those who lag behind in matters of creativity and inventiveness. Almighty Allah never promised prosperity to an idle man. The idle and backward are crushed in the struggle for survival, their identity is lost and their knowledge eroded through ensuing cultural homogeneity.

No wonder then that many cultural institutions and directorates in the Islamic World should be paralyzed whenever they are beset by crises. Similarly, it is hardly a surprise that similar institutions and directorates in industrialized countries are thriving. In Islamic countries culture is financed mostly from public funds and consequently the authority in power has the final word in both planning and implementation in the cultural field. In industrialized countries, on the other hand,

over 50% of financial and human resources (54% in France) come from the private sector; culture is thus characterized by diversity and multiplicity, and hence creativity and productivity.

This strategy has general as well as specific objectives. It has its own specificities and is confronted with obstacles which it must overcome so that it may shape or contribute to shaping the desired future of the Muslim Ummah.

Its general objectives consist in building the Islamic identity of the individual and society, reforming intellectual methods, developing the cultural pattern and achieving Islamic authenticity. This necessitates an assimilation of modernity as well as inspiration from scientific and technological innovations in order to enable the Ummah to assert its civilizational preeminence and regain its previous position as the best of nations evolved for mankind, enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong.

In order to achieve these objectives, prospective science implies first the study of future hypotheses required for the achievement of those objectives; then the method of achievement is analytically retraced until we reach the present. This requires first the analysis of the current cultural situation followed by analysis of cultural progress in the near future and then determining all activities through participation and decision making in order to find out the seeds of the present which will make the future.

As for the present cultural situation, studies agree that the contemporary Muslim individual is characterized by the loss of identity, confusion as to his competence in shaping his future and loss of self-confidence regarding his ability to achieve scientific and technological superiority over his peers in the rest of the world. Hence, he has no character nor identity and suffers from intellectual confusion, cultural absence, scientific backwardness and civilizational and human negation.

Various studies were carried out with a view to formulating a cultural strategy in the Islamic World. Nevertheless, no prospective study was carried beforehand. Most available studies are characterized by short-term perspective and suffer from shortcomings in methodology or analysis which become manifested only when they are put into practice.

These shortcomings are the result of obstacles which the strategy's methodology should have overcome in order to achieve the desired objectives. Among these obstacles are the duplication of efforts and the waste of energies owing to perpetual beginnings from scratch or to the conclusion that all previous previous achievements

in the cultural field are inadequate. In fact present achievements, although theoretical, have their merits in spite of the imperfections and confusion that characterize them. The clearest example of duplication of efforts and waste of energies in outdated issues is the wish of each institution to be the initiator of any planning, strategy or working methodology in the cultural field in the Islamic World. The same applies to various authors and thinkers who present self conscious and repetitive cultural projects in total disregard for the work of others.

Among other obstacles is the cyclical nature of the adoption of ideas. This cyclical approach leads to two other obstacles: riding the wave without prior conviction; and imitating others. Anyone who wishes to undertake a prospective study of the future of culture should be aware of these obstacles and arm himself with patience as well as determine his methodology and his thought and be aware of obstacles and traps.

3. Forecasting the future of culture:

We should first determine the concept of forecasting; then the prevailing trends in the cultural, social and economic situation. We need to determine the concept of forecasting in order to highlight its role and the need for it. When we forecast the future and investigate the concepts related to the development of the present situation, we are not necessarily fleeing from the present. The representations we have of the future are but landmarks aimed at assisting us in avoiding obstacles and in selecting the right path with a view to reforming the present in order to pave the way for a healthier and better future.

In order to determine the trends we refer to what the futuribles experts forecast in terms of mega trends for the next decade. These are not conjectures or prophecies. They are embedded in the accurate analysis of the direction the present situation is taking, a comprehensive and profound study of its impact, the changes it has witnessed in the near past, a conscious knowledge of the internal and related factors which altogether determine the shape of its development and its possible manifestations in the future. Such an analysis is not void of prediction or imagination but it involves an awareness of and submission to universal laws and regulations.

Mega tendencies

We shall rely on two new studies so as not to repeat previous and outdated predictions, particularly that prospective science is highly variable, inconstant and innovative.

In addition to modernity, and in an endeavour to present complementary points of view and to report on recently accomplished studies in the field in order to draw lessons therefrom, we present the views of the two largest contemporary schools in the field namely, the Anglo-American school and the French school.

A - The first study is by John Nesbitt and Patricia Aburdene, entitled "Mega tendencies 1990-2000, what will change?"⁽¹⁰⁾. Despite the praise and the criticism levelled at this study, its authors have the merit of following up most magazines and newspapers and analysing political, economic, intellectual and cultural changes and the related crises at the various levels. They were also keen to interview many experts, businessmen and politicians on probable future developments.

The result of their work concerning the nineties is the emergence of the following mega tendencies:

- 1) Deterioration of the world economic order.
- 2) Revival of the arts.
- 3) Rise of new socialism in eastern block countries.
- 4) Universalization of life patterns with the consolidation of cultural specificities.
- 5) Rising role of the Pacific.
- 6) Collapse of the "welfare state" in the West.
- 7) Accession of women to government
- 8) Biology age.
- 9) Religious revival
- 10) Triumph of the individual.

We shall not attempt to explain the causes for each one of these trends here as the purpose of this paper is to direct the researcher in cultural planning to the trends most likely to prevail over the next decade and take stock of what should be undertaken before it is too late.

B - The second study entitled "International Framework: eight mega tendencies" was carried out by Hugue de Jouvenel the administrative director of the International Futuribles Society which is the largest internationally acclaimed French school. This study has not been published yet and was presented at the futuribles symposium organized by the above institution and the UN programme for planning staff in Algeria on 22 and 23 May, 1990.

The eight mega tendencies are:

1) Increase in the world population and doubling of the of the demographic growth rate (between 8 and 10 billion people by the year 2025). This trend leads to four major problems:

- social and vocational assimilation of the youth;
- Demographic old age in industrialized countries;
- worldwide emigration and its impact in the emergence of multi-cultural and multi-racial societies;
- Urbanism and the expansion of cities.

2) Difficulty in ensuring food security for people particularly in the countries of the South.

3) Spread of illiteracy (one out of every four people in the world is illiterate) and the interdependence between poverty and illiteracy.

4) Crises in the Third World (deterioration of commodities' prices and the debt increase).

5) Global dangers (aggravation of natural and technological catastrophes, increase of pollution, spread of desertification due to global warming)

6) Impact of modern technology (computer science, biotechnology, new materials) on culture.

7) Rise of the computer science society. This will be accompanied by three rifts:

- increasing rift between economic development and the consumption of raw materials;
- rift between money exchange and real economics;
- rift between economic development and job opportunities (according to the author, modern technologies entered all fields to the extent that ordered goods are produced immediately according to specifications; thus, companies will increasingly respond to personal needs, and the economy will turn into a global economy).

8) The great challenge is cultural and political.

The researcher concludes that the challenge with which societies will be confronted in the future is a cultural and political challenge arising from the tendencies mentioned earlier.

As we look closely at the results of these two studies, we find that the first study based its approach on reading, compiling and analyzing the news circulated by the media and public opinion institutions. As for the second study, it is based on the views of prospective science experts without recourse to the media nor influence from public opinion. Both views are necessary, that is the one intrinsically linked to desired futures as well as the one which is free from all bonds or conditions.

In order to substantiate such studies, at least as far as guiding decision makers and planners, we present the summary of tendencies presented by a study commissioned by the French ministry of culture and communication in 1978 on cultural policies and the choices of society. The study was carried out by the International Futuribles Society in Paris and concludes that the following five tendencies shall prevail in the future:

- 1) Population growth
- 2) Development of urban space
- 3) Increasing demand for collective needs
- 4) Increasing non-materialism in the economy
- 5) Quick pace of changes and the emergence of the phenomenon of rarity.

The international experts who participated in the study agree that the world will witness transformations in three directions:

- 1) A transition from the quantitative boom to qualitative development;
- 2) Enhancement of human participation in preserving the future of the environment;
- 3) Radical change in man's perception of himself.

We believe that we have presented an adequate review of the mega tendencies as foreseen by international experts. Some of these tendencies have already occurred in the eighties and may continue throughout the nineties and beyond. Nevertheless, we should present the tendencies which we and those interested in the future consider likely to prevail in the Islamic World in the coming years. The Islamic World was never studied in a comprehensive, scientific and serious way with regards to its future perspectives by a multi-disciplinary team of individuals who care for their religion and their nation, despite several isolated attempts in many fields.

Among the tendencies we feel are likely to prevail are the perennial laws set by Almighty Allah. These are not probable phenomena; they are unchangeable and

ever-lasting. Yet there are other tendencies which shall expand and give rise to other prevailing tendencies. These are:

1) Intensification of the struggle between right and wrong. The enemies of Islam and the enemies of justice and freedom shall surround the Muslim individual and Ummah.

2) The Muslim individual and society will return to the original values and heritage. They will seek to assert their distinct features and avoid the loss of identity.

3) Emphasis by Islamic peoples on Shura and the beginning of the collapse of dictatorships.

4) Increase in population growth, increase in urban populations and overpopulation in the suburbs.

5) Immigration increase and drop in job opportunities at national level as well as abroad.

6) Collapse of the citizen's purchase power in the Islamic world spread of poverty and illiteracy.

7) Enhancement of the informational, intellectual and linguistic campaign, with emphasis on the elite benefitting from the status quo with the aim of advocating the campaign and defending it.

8) Increase in reform projects and thwarted attempts to achieve some of them.

9) Gradual disenchantment with Western civilization and greater desire by Muslim peoples to confront the scientific and technological challenge and achieve preeminence therein.

10) disintegration of economic conditions due to high debts.

11) Possible outbreak of regional conflicts instigated by racist groups and religiously or ideologically hostile groups.

12) Collapse of many political, economic and educational systems.

13) Aggravation of challenges and crises.

14) Continuation of the firm as a stronghold only occasionally affected by the influence of Islamic revival.

15) Increase, although at a slow pace, in the publishing of serious scientific studies with a view to overcoming the crisis.

16) Development of Islamic thought particularly in social sciences in order to enable it to face the challenges.

17) Expansion of leisure time versus limited wages and income.

18) Spread of unemployment among the youth.

19) The Islamic revival: from self assertion to the formulation of an alternative civilizational project.

20) Stronger call for Islamic unity and the emergence of institutions for actual achievement.

This is not the place to expound these tendencies. Those interested may want to refer to the researches and documents of the Algiers symposium on the future of the Islamic world (Shawwal 1410H/May 1990) organized by the Centre of Islamic Future Studies (London), which will soon be published in book form by the same center.

It seems that the pressure will intensify on the Islamic World. This is not a new development; invasions and divisions have affected the Islamic world for more than two centuries. Although they paralyze the Islamic World and shackle it with secondary issues that lead nowhere, they may also play a stimulating role and boost the energies of the Muslim individual thus freeing him from the grasp of dependence and backwardness.

This state of deterioration will be followed by the relinquishing by various states of their responsibility in terms of any social action in order to spare their efforts and gear them towards solving their economic woes as a result of soaring debts, reduced job opportunities, hankering for the possession of Western goods, drawing inspiration from Western thought, language, culture and civilization. This leads to a new form of slavery for Muslims as a result of the need to secure work or hard currency. This in turn leads to new forms of colonialism or protectorate that enable the foreign visitor and investor to enjoy freedoms and privileges not enjoyed by the indigenous population.

Cultural action programme for a better future

In order to confront the negative effects of the above-mentioned tendencies in the near future and to benefit from their positive aspects, efforts in the Islamic World should be concentrated in the following fields:

- Education and cultural training to build the cultural identity
- Protecting the Muslim individual religiously, scientifically, intellectually and culturally
- Nurturing the spirit of challenge and competition

- Nurturing the spirit of perseverance and resistance
- Nurturing the principles of justice, integrity and the struggle against tyranny and negligence
- Resistance to consumer models and the phenomenon of dependence
- Giving Sharia its proper role in establishing society's laws, systems and life patterns.
- Educate this generation according to the teachings of the Holy Qur'an and the Prophet's Sunna while avoiding excessive zeal as well as ignorance.
- Refine the spirits of people and urge them to do good for their well-being in the hereafter
- Present the Prophet (PBUH) as the ultimate model
- Nurture collective spirit and discourage isolationism and individualism
- Encourage participation in the Islamic civilizational project.

These fields are interconnected and interdependent. To achieve the above objectives, we must begin by fighting sluggishness, apathy and the spirit of defeatism in facing problems. Similarly, we must not give up hope after the first attempt. These are basically cultural problems to which should be added the fight against fanaticism and ignorance in addition to consolidating commitment to the Holy Book and the Sunna in such a way as to preserve the foundations of Islamic legislation and benefit from the offerings of the current era.

Those who believe in the separation of learning from-knowledge, science from culture and culture from development are necessarily doomed to failure. And those who believe that development is science becoming culture, that Islam is the Qur'an becoming a way of life and that the Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) is our best example will necessarily prevail.

May Almighty Allah guide us onto the right path.

Footnotes

1) Rapport sur l'état de la technique, published by the Centre de Prospective et d'Evaluation, French ministry of scientific and technological research and the ministry of industrial reconversion and foreign trade. Published as a special issue of the journal "Sciences et Techniques" of the engineers and technicians association in France at the end of 1985, p11.

2) There are several references in this field among which are:

* Initiation à la coopération européenne en recherche et développement technologiques, Jacques Molinari. Published as part of the studies of the French Centre de Prospective et d'Evaluation, 1990.

* Dr. Jacques Robin; Changer d'ère. He is a doctor in charge of supervising the centre of advanced technological studies. He also supervises the French Science and Culture publication. Scuil publications, 1989, particularly chapters 2,3 and 4 related to cultural crises and their relation to science and technology.

* Jacques Lesourne; Education et société: Les défis de l'an 2000. He is the expert in charge of Interfuturus the famous futuribles project of the OECD. This book is a detailed and accurate report submitted to the French minister of education; permission for publication was granted in 1988.

* Le monde vu d'Europe is the report of the conference on forecasting the European future held in Paris, April 1987. Published by the CPE, Paris 1989.

* Europe 1995, FAST Report; published by the European Community in two vast volumes and presented in abridged form in a book published by the International Futuribles Society, December 1983.

* "Entrer dans le XXIe siècle"; prepared by the French secretariat for planning. It is a report by a group of experts on the cultural and civilizational system which monitors the French future and identity. Published by La Découverte, Paris, September 1990.

3) This issue was persistently raised at the symposium "Science and Culture in the 21st Century: Programme for Survival" which was organized by UNESCO in Vancouver, Canada from 10 to 15 September 1989. The author of this research paper translated an important paper entitled "The Fusion of Science and Culture - The Key to the 21st Century" presented by Dr. Al-Mehdi Al-Manjara at the said symposium. Published in "Al-Mustaqbal Al-Arabi" journal, issue 136, June 1990.

The same issue was raised at UNESCO's symposium held in Paris from 14 to 16 June, 1989 on "Science and Technology in the Service of the Future". Abstracts were published in Impact magazine, issue 155/1989 published by UNESCO. The same issue includes a very interesting study entitled "Is Science part of Culture?" pp291-305, by the Soviet expert Vladimir Petrovich Zentcheknew, member of the Science Academy in the Soviet Union, member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and founding president of the Institution of Man.

- 4) For more information on the ideas of Prigorine and his concept of science, see "Science, Civilization and Democracy: values, systems, structures and relations", World Culture issue 44, January 1989, pp7-26.
- 5) See the above mentioned article by Dr. Al-Manjara, p.17
- 6) op cit
- 7) See the special issue of Futuribles journal published by the International Futuribles Society, September-October, 1978, issue 17 which includes the researches of the aforementioned study.
- 8) Ibn Mandhour; Lissan Al-Arab. Dar Sader publishing house, Beirut, volume 9, pp 171-172.
- 9) Al-Fairuz Abadi; Al-Qamous Al-Muhit. Arrisala institution, first edition, 1986, p 1065.
- 10) John Naishitt, Patricia Aburdenc, "MEGA TENDENCIES, 1990-2000: Ce qui va changer", First documents, 1990.