Strategies for Interreligious and Inter-Muslim Dialogue: A Proposed Methodology

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Abstract

This article describes a simple adapted methodology of strategy formulation which minority Muslim organizations can use to formulate their own growth strategies using small Muslim groups and both interreligious and inter-Muslim dialogue. The methodology combines with a portfolio of choices of different genres of Christian–Muslim dialogue, observed in practice, which can also be adapted for planning and programming inter-Muslim dialogue. The objectives may include improved relations between Muslims and Christians, increased cohesion across minority Muslim communities, as well as the revivification of involved local minority Muslim communities. The method of strategy formulation with the portfolio of different genres of dialogue can be used to plan and program elite and non-elite dialogue across communities, providing theoretically for an expansion of dialogue across communities.

Introduction

The purpose and scope of this article is focused on providing some rationale and reflection on the practice of utilizing interreligious/inter-Muslim dialogue with small Muslim groups as a strategic tool by minority Muslim organizations. The purpose of this dialogue using small Muslim groups is to foster improved relations with non-Muslim (i.e. Christian) communities, primarily in the West, to foster and enhance relations between minority Muslim communities, and ultimately for Muslims to revivify their own local communities.

The methodology herein described is designed for the production of organizational strategies utilizing the tool of small groups and various genres of dialogue across communities. This methodology is understood to be constructed with the objective primarily of fostering Islamic resurgence through improving inter-religious relations. This Islamic resurgence entails the intellectual advancement of and the spiritual revivification of contemporary Muslim communities. To help to achieve this, the expanded use of small groups by Islamic movements can be effective as a tool for fostering inter-Muslim dialogue and more cohesion amongst historically variegated Islamic movements, minority Muslim communities and diverse Muslim intellectual traditions. Inter-Muslim dialogue is one part of achieving the growth and advancement of minority Muslim communities. The result of this inter-Muslim dialogue would be an intellectual advancement and spiritual stimulation of the various parties involved in such dialogues. However, the long-term success of this inter-Muslim dialogue entails an important modality of inter-religious dialogue, in the West this being most often Christian–Muslim dialogue.

An important assumption in this article is that the methodology, skill sets, and experience gleaned from inter-religious dialogues are often also useful in organizing and
programming inter-Muslim dialogues. Small groups can be used when and where appropriate in inter-religious dialogues with non-Muslims, benefiting relations between minority Muslims and non-Muslims and helping to secure the position of Muslims presently in minority situations. The methodology and knowledge can then also be used for programming inter-Muslim dialogue projects leading to more cohesion between minority Muslim communities. From the perspective of an originating and sponsoring Islamic movement, small groups can be used effectively for expanding the growth and outreach (dawah) with the Message and spiritual offering of the minority Muslim community both to Muslims and to non-Muslims.

This discussion of formulating strategies for utilizing small Muslim groups should be understood to describe an end product (strategy formulations and associated project innovations) which include and maintain commonly recognized traditional Islamic ideologies derived using the methodology of the classical Islamic sciences and using Islamic criteria to test the results. Thereby the intention is to maintain Islamic authenticity and credibility across Muslim groups and minority Muslim communities, utilizing traditional Islamic sciences and methodology but combining the final project ideas and strategy formulations with contemporary concepts of methodology and organization. This combination of traditional Islamic sciences with contemporary sciences is necessary to be relevant and responsive to contemporary contexts, especially for Muslims in minority situations.

To augment a necessary core of traditional Islamic ideology in contemporary Islamic resurgence projects, the methodology for small Muslim groups in this paper is adapted in part from a simple but workable business methodology constructed for strategy formulation in smaller and medium-sized businesses. The adapted methodology is intended for use by Muslim scholars and activists in the field.

Strategies for Islamic resurgence utilizing small groups can be realistic if accurate assessments are made about the local milieu surrounding minority Muslim communities and movements, if an accurate assessment is also made of the strategic starting points of involved Muslim organizations, and if the strategy for small Muslim groups is well-formulated in its response to meet the current situation and needs of minority Muslim communities locally. It is an important and optimistic main assumption in this article that there are good overall prospects for aiding and realizing Islamic resurgence in minority Muslim communities using small Muslim groups if there is resolve and determination by activist and scholarly Muslims to follow through on their chosen strategies of using small Muslim groups for as long as is necessary to achieve their own strategic objectives of Islamic resurgence.

While the ultimate end product of strategy formulations resulting from the use of the proposed methodology in small Muslim groups should integrate a realistic response to these current realities of local Muslim communities, there is also a need for an optimal positioning of small Muslim groups and projects amidst these different minority Muslim communities and institutions in the local milieu to program and implement this response. The term “optimally positioned” here means that a small group strategy for Islamic resurgence incorporates an effective assessment and response to the local environment (external realities) surrounding the small Muslim group and the local (minority) Muslim communities and also includes provisions taking into consideration the internal realities of the community. To facilitate credible inter-Muslim dialogue, this engagement by small Muslim groups of diverse minority Muslim communities should take into consideration an adequate knowledge of the organizational culture and the present level, strategic scope, and purpose of the Islamic scholarship and leadership
that exists within these Muslim communities. These all affect the initial choice of the
genre and design of dialogue projects. Knowledge of scholarly level, organizational
culture and history, and organizational strategy are all taken into consideration when
deciding where best to place/position a small group in relation to an existing minority
Muslim community or institution that is to be engaged in dialogue. This engagement
and dialogue should invite more cohesion amongst variegated minority Muslim commu-
nities and movements.

This process requires fostering a rigorous approach to both traditional and contem-
porary Islamic scholarship. This fostering of Islamic resurgence will require Muslim
scholars and leadership that will be able to credibly bridge the gap between both tra-
ditional and modern Muslim intelligentsias.1 The bridging of the gap between traditional
and modern Muslim intelligentsias would be achieved in the preparatory work for inter-
Muslim dialogues carried out amongst small Muslim groups and the existing minority
Muslim communities, thus affecting the design and choice of genre of dialogue projects.
It will be critical that the Islamic scholarship be credible in inter-Muslim dialogues,
representing well and convincingly the interests and positions of involved minority
Muslim communities across different Muslim communities and, in a savvy way, striving
to make Islam in outreach seem more relevant and appealing to non-Muslims. This
means simultaneously understanding contemporary society and politics while formulat-
ing sometimes complex strategies for Islamic resurgence. The process of strategy formu-
lation necessarily involves ongoing scholarly review and strategic integration of religious
doctrines, working to carry out and achieve the strategic outcomes that credibly benefit
the interests of the larger Muslim community as a whole, including dialogue across minor-
ity Muslim communities. This will require the involvement of Islamic scholars and
leaders who are intellectually and spiritually equipped for this major endeavor.

The actual methodology of strategy formulation for using small Muslim groups is
essentially a simple series of six steps that focus inquiry and assessment, incorporating
a set of categories of interreligious dialogue, which have been observed existing in
actual practice in North America. These steps can be used within small Muslim organ-
izations, implemented with a circumspect understanding of the local social milieu and
what can reasonably be initially expected (the strategic starting point) within existing
Muslim communities. This method for formulating strategy for small Muslim groups
can be reiterated, recycled and regularly reviewed to optimally reorient and reposition
small Muslim groups as necessary in relation to minority Muslim communities to be
benefited. The reiteration and recycling of the methodology by Islamic organizations
to formulate and reformulate their own strategies for using small groups should
update obsolescent strategies as necessary.

Method for Strategy Formulation Adapted for Islamic Movements

The simple method for strategy formulation that can be adapted for use in small Muslim
groups can be found in an article in the Harvard Business Review on Management, where
Frank Gilmore wrote on “Formulation of Strategy in Smaller Companies”.2 Gilmore
notes that although larger corporations study sophisticated concepts of formulating cor-
porate strategy, these hold little promise for medium-sized and smaller companies, where
strategic planning is still more of an art than a science.3 Judgment, experience, intuitions
and well-guided discussions are the key to success for strategy formulation in smaller
companies.4 As with smaller American companies, we can assume that small Islamic
organizations will usually not employ the complex and expensive strategic methodologies
of larger organizations. For small groups, as for small companies, the methodology put forward in Gilmore’s article outlines a simple practical method and rationale that can be adapted for use by and followed at the level of the small Muslim group. Gilmore’s method can be applied for strategy formulation in either a centralized way in both a strategic center or headquarters of an Islamic organization or institution or in a more decentralized way with more autonomous new small Muslim groups. It can be used by a variety of minority Muslim organizations, centralized and decentralized.

To first follow through the general outline of Gilmore’s method for formulating a strategy for the small Muslim group as a distinct unit in a wider strategy and to relate it to how an Islamic movement might employ this methodology of strategy formulation for Islamic resurgence, we can see that Gilmore outlines six steps for formulating strategy. These are: (1) Record Current Strategy; (2) Identify Problems; (3) Discover the Core Elements; (4) Formulate Alternatives; (5) Evaluate Alternatives; and (6) Choose the New Strategy.5

Step One: Recording the Current Strategy

The first step of Gilmore’s simple method, which can be adapted to formulate strategy for small Muslim groups involves “recording the current strategy”. In Islamic organizations, this will most often be the received traditional scholarship and organizational culture as it exists today. The current strategies of existing Islamic movements can be many depending on their geographical location and origin, intellectual history, and unique individual historicity. In the West, for example, a small Muslim group seeking inter-Muslim dialogue and fostering cohesion amongst communities can expect to encounter existing strategies in minority Muslim organizations, which can be assumed to be variations on themes of agendas imported by immigrant communities from the Muslim world. The intellectual history of Muslim movements in the Muslim world has been described generally by Ibrahim Abu-Rabi’.6 These are differentiated from the strategies of the Afro-American Muslim communities which have their own history and objectives.7 For our purposes of constructing a strategy, these organizations may be presumed to be already flooded with demands made on their existing resources of money and manpower.

Assuming that all of these minority Muslim organizations, immigrant and indigenous, need help with resources of manpower and finances, could they be aided by the use of small Muslim groups to expand their activities and meet more effectively the demands made upon their resources? This should be considered as the existing strategies of these minority Muslim organizations are assumed to be not sufficient in their present form for purposes of achieving a wider Islamic resurgence. Useful for planning is the work of Ingrid Mattson describing how different Muslims in America view working with non-Muslims.8 Also useful is the work of Yvonne Yazbek Haddad on how different Muslims have viewed pluralism differently.9 Increasingly, minority Muslim organizations will not find themselves able to simply follow these traditional Muslim strategies, especially if these are isolationist, ineffective or irrelevant to the needs of contemporary Muslims locally. Times and circumstances change and new strategies will have to succeed where existing ones have fallen short. Small Muslim groups present an option which can be inexpensive and can offer innovative ways to utilize existing manpower resources.

Step Two: Identifying Problems, Needs and Concerns

The second step of Gilmore’s method of strategy formulation is “to identify problems”.10 All communities have problems and minority Muslim communities are quite like any
others in this respect. It can be discerned rather quickly that many existing minority Muslim organizations have intellectual and strategic limitations in their leadership and in their membership of mostly non-scholars. Small Muslim groups that would find interested partners in purposeful inter-Muslim dialogue with members of these minority Muslim communities can have plans and be positioned to find and provide solutions to overcome these strategic and scholarly limitations.

Assuming that there are always problems in existing minority Muslim communities, these can begin to be outlined with a general assumption that mosques and Islamic institutions are almost always limited in terms of finances and manpower. There is often a need for ways to more effectively use existing resources (mobilizing and motivating volunteers) to achieve their basic organizational functions as well as outreach/dawah, (let alone the noble and seemingly lofty goals of achieving inter-Muslim dialogue and inter-communal cohesion.) The reality is that minority Muslim communities have resource limitations and remain divided for various historical and political reasons. Whatever the problems of minority Muslim organizations are perceived to be, the background for constructing a strategy for Islamic resurgence must accurately assess what these problems are as a strategic starting point in the social milieu and state of existing minority Muslim communities before they begin to describe realistic prospects for overcoming the problems of these Muslim communities.

Step Three: Identifying the Components of Problems, Needs and Concerns

To discover the “core elements” of problems to be overcome is the third step of the method which Gilmore outlines. What the “core elements” of these problems inhibiting resurgence and outreach are would be a matter of ongoing research and discussion for Muslim scholars and activists acting in small Muslim groups and engaging various leaders, scholars, and activists in various Islamic movements and minority Muslim communities. It should be realistically expected that experienced leaders and scholars in various minority Muslim communities and movements quite often already have a good general idea of the composition and nature of many of these communal problems and challenges. They may also already know the core elements of these problems and challenges facing their own minority Muslim communities. Small Muslim groups assisting in focusing on and analyzing these core elements of problems within the minority Muslim communities and their local settings should position themselves to be truly of service, utilizing available intellectual equipment from both classical Islamic sciences and contemporary sciences. They can do this by providing scholars of these different communities and movements with more opportunities (forums) to exchange their observations and reflections formed in experience, discussing these matters with others in these small Muslim groups, raising consciousness and drawing attention to these core elements of problems as matters of concern.

In general, a major category of core elements that must be researched in an ongoing manner can be identified where Abu Rabi’ has outlined: there is a need to bridge the gap between traditional and contemporary Muslim intelligentsias. The “core elements” to be identified will be the points of “non-meeting” between traditional Islamic scholarship and contemporary scholarship, causing a strategic “irrelevance,” or a failure to be effective in a contemporary setting. This analysis of core elements of problems will pave the way for further steps in formulating strategy as strategic alternatives are considered. The analysis of core elements and later formulation of solutions and alternatives is where traditional and contemporary Islamic scholarship can meet in a practical way.
Step Four: Formulating Solutions and Alternatives

The fourth step of Gilmore’s method for formulating strategy includes moving beyond analysis and into formulating alternatives. The formulation of alternatives suggested by leaders and scholars after an analysis of core elements of problems will require that these groups of scholars, leaders and activists would accomplish this “bridging of the gap” in their proposals. The proposals of strategic alternatives should be for interesting and relevant resurgence projects and activities: in this negotiated process of strategy formulation and project innovation, innovating interesting projects is critical if community members are to be involved. The experience of seasoned scholars, activists and leaders in minority Islamic movements and communities is necessary for proposing workable project ideas.

It is in this fourth stage of strategy formulation that the portfolio of different genres of interreligious dialogue described by Jane I. Smith can be considered as possible alternatives, these being described in more detail in the next section on interreligious and inter-Muslim dialogue. Other possible examples of these projects can include mosque construction, Islamic center or *dawah* center construction, various *dawah* projects, inter-Muslim dialogue projects, educational events, scholarly productions and publications, and so on. Important to note is that these new formulations of strategic alternatives could “spin off” interesting contemporary Islamic scholarship which could bridge the gap between traditional and contemporary Muslim intelligentsias. The process of formulating alternatives is also an area where Islamic scholarship can interface with Western scholarship in a practical way.

It is also in this fourth step that needs, wants and hopes of the community can be seen to be expressed, raising organizational momentum, mustering volunteers, and innovating related projects and activities that are part of a solution to real community wants and needs. Muslims involved in this part of strategy formulation would have the benefit of a deeper understanding of the core elements of the problems before setting about pursuing activist strategic alternatives which manifest in projects and activities which seek to solve these problems. The strategic alternatives that become available at this point in the process of strategy formulation establish and utilize a multitude of small Muslim groups each group operates with one or multiple functions in relation to minority Muslim communities and institutions.

Step Five: Evaluating Strategic Project Alternatives

The fifth step of Gilmore’s method is to evaluate these strategic project alternatives. Of course one alternative that always exists is to simply follow the existing strategies of minority Muslim communities and more or less continue on as the existing minority Muslim communities have done heretofore. The question with this choice must then be asked if this strategic choice would lead to stagnation in the existing minority Muslim communities and perpetuate division and Muslim irrelevance in contemporary society. This is the “business-as-usual” or “do-nothing alternative” which is not recommended in this article.

The fifth step of Gilmore’s model of strategy formulation would include an evaluation of the different new resurgence projects and new choices. This strategy formulation will include an evaluation and selection of associated projects and activities that would carry out the formulated strategy. There must be an ongoing discernment of how much the local small Muslim group is willing and intellectually and spiritually equipped and
interested in each individual case to engage local existing minority Muslim communities. There will also have to be some kind of strategic and task control to insure that chosen resurgence projects are working and achieving desired outcomes. The proof then will later be plain to see in results which can be assessed.

**Step Six: Choosing and Applying the New Strategy**

The sixth and final step in Gilmore’s method of formulation of strategy adapted for small Muslim groups is “to choose a new strategy”. This choice of a new strategy will have taken into account both choices of resurgence projects and positioning of small Muslim groups. On a continuum between two main choices of positioning small Muslim groups are groups that are somewhere between being either “very close” or “very distant” in proximity to existing minority Muslim communities. The small Muslim groups can even shift or alternate between being very closely associated or only distantly associated with existing minority Muslim communities and movements. This positioning of physical proximity will have a logistical effect on what possibilities exist for cooperative projects and inter-Muslim dialogue between small Muslim groups and minority Muslim communities. As necessary, the various originators and sponsors of small Muslim groups can reiteratively re-evaluate alternatives (step 5 of Gilmore’s method) and choose new strategies (step 6) (including projects and positioning) for their small Muslim groups.

**Positioning the Small Groups for Engagement**

After the new strategic alternatives are evaluated and chosen, these small Muslim groups can be positioned in carefully chosen varying degrees of proximity and in relation to both existing minority Muslim and new Muslim communities and institutions, engaging them in projects and activities that are of benefit to the wider Muslim community. Assuming an ever-present tendency towards “inertia” in existing Muslim communities, these small Muslim groups could be a scholarly and activist vanguard in Islamic resurgence at the local level involving minority Muslim communities. Strategies for Islamic resurgence could initially be either innovative new internal strategies of these small groups seeking to engage scholars and activists from existing Islamic movements and minority Muslim communities or they could follow more the lead of the existing minority Muslim communities, both choices being in a negotiated process of strategy formulation and project innovation reiterating and recycling an adaptation of Gilmore’s six-point method. These small Muslim groups with an advanced Islamic scholarship would work with the strategic starting points of the existing minority Muslim communities, the local contemporary social milieu, and perhaps even establish their own new organizations as a result of inter-Muslim dialogue and engagement.

As mentioned, an important factor affecting the initial choice of positioning and choice of projects will be the level of Islamic scholarship and intellectual equipment of small group members and of members of minority Muslim communities. However, as small groups and communities advance their internal level of scholarship and as trust in inter-Muslim dialogue is established, groups should expect to also adjust and shift their physical and emotional distance to existing Muslim communities over time, changing and expanding their choice of projects. An adaptation of Gilmore’s six-step method can be reiterated and used to reformulate this strategy as necessary, establishing and repositioning multiple small Muslim groups in variable proximity to local minority
Muslim communities. As participants become more experienced and knowledgeable, the dispersion of small groups can increase over time successfully spreading them from the originating center of the host, expanding the reach of the original Islamic organization. Islamic resurgence and inter-Muslim dialogue can thereby expand outward from its sponsoring and originating Islamic organization as its source. The “source” of these small Muslim groups benefiting minority Muslim communities can be one or more of these minority Muslim communities or even an outside organization. Critical for success in any case is the quality of Islamic scholarship, of innovative resurgence projects, and of inter-Muslim dialogues.

**Strategic Control of Small Groups and Dialogue Across Minority Communities**

Success with a new strategy can present a real challenge and one must ask, “what if we are successful?” Strategic control is important to ensure that small Muslim groups are achieving their intended outcomes. Strategic management13 can be adapted to manage small groups in dialogue. Strategic management of small Muslim groups would optimally keep them functioning actively to follow not only their own internal strategies, but also to ensure that they work in a direction to achieve a wider Islamic resurgence in minority Muslim communities, inter-Muslim cohesion, and improved relations with non-Muslims. Following the rationale and flow of the strategic management process, leaders of Islamic organizations will need to also evaluate progress and success of small Muslim groups and their resurgence projects and activities using their chosen Islamic criteria for qualitative evaluation.

It may be reasonably assumed that Islamic organizations sponsoring small Muslim groups which implement their own strategies for Islamic resurgence will rely not only on informal controls (phone conversations and mail) and traditions but also on a mix of “formal and informal strategic controls”14 to implement their larger organizational strategies for Islamic resurgence. These increasingly dispersed small Muslim groups will need strategic controls (written doctrines and guidelines and budgets) to conform to and be part of any larger strategy of Islamic resurgence. Even geographically dispersed groups which are totally independent of larger organizations will probably find a need to employ their own “formal strategic controls” (written doctrines, guidelines and budgets) to control the implementation of larger growth strategies for Islamic resurgence in addition to the “informal strategic controls” such as face to face meetings, telephone conversations, and simple emails between the periphery and the center.15

This need for establishing group doctrine to steer Islamic resurgence along a controlled strategy may increase as distance between the original centers of these groups, which are responsible for leadership and coordinating strategies for Islamic resurgence, and the new chapters of small Muslim groups expand in number and as dynamism (change) in the local environments of the new local small Muslim groups increases.16 However, to say exactly how a sponsoring Islamic organization and small groups will shift their emphases in different contexts amongst different forms of controls, i.e. formal and informal, doctrinal and financial controls, is complex and changing and beyond the scope of this article. Hassel studied the efficient mix of budgetary control with regard to the relationship of a Finnish multinational headquarters to its subsidiaries and how environmental dynamism might impact budgetary controls.17 What can be said for certain is that a mix of controls as described by Anthony and Govindarajan will be relied on to achieve effective strategic management. Whether formal and informal, financial and strategic, emphases may shift amongst these. The strategic (doctrinal) and
financial controls may be redesigned as necessary, these also being a product of the
six-step strategy formulation methodology adapted from Gilmore’s original article.

**Interreligious and Inter-Muslim Dialogue**

We can find some confirmation of the need for inter-religious engagement and dialogue
in a recent chapter by Khurshid Ahmad in *The Blackwell Companion to Contemporary
Islamic Thought* entitled and describing the “World Situation After September 11th,
2001”. Khurshid Ahmad calls for the Muslim strategy needing to be one of “engagement
and dialogue” while we remain clear and uncompromising in our Muslim objectives . . .
but we should also be polite, rational, cool and considerate in all our responses, our
identity to be the mid-most nation, a people who adopt a balanced approach (*ummat-e-wasat*).18 As mentioned already, this engagement and dialogue is useful experience
and skills and information gleaned in inter-religious dialogue can often also be used in
formulating strategies and programming of inter-Muslim dialogue. Inter-religious
dialogue is an endeavor that Muslim scholars and activists can choose to be intellectually
equipped for as it can be assumed to have certain benefits, enhancing the security of
minority Muslim communities, providing information for *dawah*, and providing infor-
mation for assessing the local environment for the early phases of strategy formulation
mentioned earlier.

For the purpose of formulating different strategic project alternatives it is useful to
consider the work of Jane I. Smith wherein she describes several models of inter-religious
dialogue in North America that have been attempted.19 These models can be part of an
available portfolio of a selection of various models for differentiated strategies depending
on local needs. One is the “Confrontation/Debate” model.20 (The author of this article
does not recommend this.) These have been designed to disprove the validity of other
religions. There is a “Dialogue as Information Sharing” model and this one is more
common.21 There is also a “Theological Exchange Model” that encourages a deeper
correspondence about elements of faith within traditions of Christianity and Islam.22
There is an “Ethical Exchange Model,” and this focused more on ethics than theology.23
There is a “Dialogue to Come Closer Model” of inter-religious dialogue
which entertains a hope that Christianity and Islam will come closer and look at com-
monalities, leading to a de-emphasis of differences and a re-emphasis on mutuality
and sharing.24 There is a “Spirituality and Moral Healing” model of dialogue.25
There is a “Cooperative Model for Addressing Pragmatic Concerns,” which may
provide more focus and structure than other types of dialogue.26

All of these models represent differentiated choices of methodology for inter-religious
dialogue and may also be used for planning and programming inter-Muslim dialogue,
formulating projects and activities for Islamic resurgence in different contexts using
small Muslim groups. This means that different Muslim groups engaging in inter-
Muslim dialogue could for example, exchange information about themselves, have an
Islamic theological exchange, discuss Islamic ethics, have a dialogue to come closer as
Muslims, engage in an Islamic spirituality as moral healing model of dialogue, or have
cooperative dialogue to address joint Muslim pragmatic concerns, but not be limited
to the above categories and genres of dialogue. Some of these genres require an elite
training whereas others require less intellectual equipment: dialogues can be elite and
non-elite.

Whereas *dawah* is simply an imperative for Muslims, some evidence for inter-religious
dialogue stimulating a renewed interest in a revivified religiosity can also be found in
non-Muslim sources, although it should be noted that opinion about inter-religious dialogue between Christians and Muslims is very varied in both Christian and Muslim communities. Goddard states that “a real inter-religious dialogue can lead to a greater understanding of truth, even where there is disagreement”. Muslims engaging in sincere inter-religious dialogues that all participants find opening up greater understanding of truth and leading to trust-building should find better relations being established with members of those communities. This can help to establish the security of minority Muslim communities as well as advance mutual understanding and acceptance.

Qualitative Scope and Assessment of Projects and Strategies: Examples of Muslim Scholarly Opinions

As stated earlier, the purpose of this article is not to promote any one movement over another (this might tend to limit the broader reach of inter-Muslim dialogue with small Muslim groups). Nonetheless, qualitative assessment of the process and its results is important. It is important to describe in some qualitative detail the results obtained through the use of the internal methodology in small Muslim groups to achieve advances in Islamic scholarship and effectuate resurgence projects. We can also select some examples of offerings of contemporary Muslim scholars for consideration and begin to consider an example of how the model of strategy formulation works together with Islamic scholarship for resurgence. Of course, different readers should consider how their own select Islamic scholars’ ideologies would interface with an adaptation of the six-step method of strategy formulation.

An example of one Islamic scholar recognized internationally for his efforts in Islamic resurgence, is Khurshid Ahmad of Pakistan. From a roundtable on Islamic resurgence at Hartford Seminary, he notes that the intellectual leaders of Islamic resurgence have reemphasized what is essential and fundamental as opposed to what is peripheral and secondary and maintained tolerance vis-à-vis sectarianism. What can be taken as important for the purposes of this paper is that Khurshid Ahmad emphasizes the integrity of the Islamic value framework, Islamic methodology, maintaining Islamic authenticity, and respecting the moral fiber of the Religion while being able to encounter, without feelings of inferiority, Western culture, Western thought, and Western values. Muslims must be in a position to protect the moral, ethical and intellectual fiber of Islam. Muslims engaging others must be sincere and loyal to their own value framework and negotiated Islamic resurgence projects and activities should achieve and maintain this integrity of their own Islamic value system, methodology, and credibility throughout their lifespan.

Tariq Ramadan presents another example of a contemporary scholarly opinion, providing some circumspect description of what needs the Muslim community in Europe is facing along with suggestions of focus in methodology which might be used. Small Muslim groups can of course be elite (scholarly) or non-elite (activist) depending on the needs and purpose for which the small groups are established. To take a brief selection of ideas from Ramadan’s writing where he references Yusuf Qaradawi yields an ijtihad methodology that is more elite in nature, requiring more intellectual equipment and training. Ramadan, referencing Yusuf Qardawi, notes that it is logistically not feasible to have individual Muslims performing ijtihad and it is also not feasible for jurists individually and alone to master all the necessary sciences to deal with the problems of Muslims in contemporary society. Ramadan maintains that, with new and important problems, individual ijtihad alone cannot be relied upon and we should move from
individual to collective *ijtihad* on which there is consultation between scholars, especially for questions which are of general interest. To achieve the purpose of collective *ijtihad* in elite groups bringing together multiple scholars with different areas of expertise, the methodology proposed in this article could be utilized in planning and programming small groups to augment the elite methodology described by Tariq Ramadan and Yusuf Qaradawi.

The overall general direction and scope of utilizing small Muslim groups and fostering inter-Muslim dialogue and cohesion amongst Islamic communities for Islamic resurgence can be assessed using different qualitative Islamic criteria, depending on the politics of each Islamic movement sponsoring small Muslim groups. To qualitatively assess the outcome of inter-Muslim dialogue, a third opinion, the perspective of the British Muslim scholar Abdul-Hakim Murad provides one example of a qualitative standard and scope for assessment of results. Murad opines that the new agenda needed by American communities need not end up in Islamic liberalism as this would lead to an attenuation of faith and its resources for dealing with extremism are limited. The right approach is to return to the spirit of the tradition and quarry it for resources enabling a capacity for courteous conviviality. Murad also warns about Salafist and modernist agendas.

Of course, this is only one opinion of a respected British Islamic scholar. Each Islamic movement can adapt some variation of the above described six-step methodology and rationale when formulating strategies for using small Muslim groups and fostering inter-Muslim dialogue and cohesion amongst minority Muslim communities. In so doing, each Islamic movement will also have their own scholars’ opinions on what will be the right objectives and right outcomes when using the right mix of traditional Islamic knowledge and methods combined with contemporary knowledge and methods.

**Conclusion**

This adapted methodology for using small groups can be relevant and useful for those responsible for formulating and choosing strategy (leaders, scholars and activists) of different Islamic movements. Those who take an interest in inexpensively expanding the reach of their intellectual and spiritual offering as well as for local mosque and institutional leaders who find that the time and energy/manpower and economic resources of their communities are almost always limited may find that the utilization of small Muslim groups can provide a much needed expansion of possibilities for the Muslim community. As the wider Muslim community presently consists of variegated communities and movements with uncoordinated and un-integrated smaller strategies, reflecting a certain lack of cohesion and sometimes even a divisiveness of diverse Muslim communities, small Muslim groups and dialogue are presented herein as a strategic tool to be used to overcome these challenges facing minority Muslim communities, effectuating beneficial outcomes for this so-described larger Muslim community.

Working with this starting point of minority Muslim communities as they exist today in their present contexts and using an adapted and combined methodology to formulate strategies for small Muslim organizations to achieve Islamic resurgence, we can try to formulate a prospective long-term prognosis for the outcomes of these strategies. To be optimistic, one prognosis of possible strategic outcomes of an Islamic resurgence using small Muslim groups could include increasing the overall number of Muslims especially in places where Muslims are a minority. However, a qualitative expansion of Muslim communities may be a more immediately important objective. Increasing
credible inter-Muslim dialogue and therewith increasing inquiry into the intellectual and spiritual offering of each involved minority Muslim community would increase understanding and hopefully more acceptance across Muslim communities. This could lead to more cohesion and cooperation amongst existing Muslim communities. The major modality of inter-religious dialogue providing equipment for inter-Muslim dialogue should not be overlooked as a potential tool: Muslims could look forward to improved relations with, for example, Christians in the West, this being a matter of importance especially for minority Muslim communities.

The proposed methodology is a strategic tool which various Muslim organizations and movements can utilize as they individually find useful and beneficial to their own local Muslim communities and to others, Muslim and non-Muslim. This discussion is made without the intent of judging or evaluating any of the larger strategies of individual Islamic movements or organizations and not to discourage with prejudice the legitimate use of small groups by any particular Islamic movement or organization. Although the author tends to mention examples from Western contexts and scholarship constructed in the West with an eye to benefiting the growth and expansion of minority Muslim communities in the West, the concept of the legitimate use of small Muslim groups to benefit Muslim communities cannot be necessarily limited to Western contexts. Muslims elsewhere are welcome to consider if it would be prudent and appropriate to employ the methodology of utilizing small groups, put forward in this article, to benefit their own Muslim communities and relations with others. The end results that Muslims can strive for would include an increased local momentum in their own movements, enhanced relations and cohesion across minority Muslim communities and improved relations with non-Muslims generally. In the West this would most often mean the prospect of improved relations with Christians.

NOTES

1. Ibrahim Abu-Rabi’, “A Post-September 11 Critical Assessment of Modern Islamic History”, in September 11: Religious Perspectives on the Causes and Consequences, eds I. Markham and I. M. Abu Rabi’, Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2002, pp. 21–45.
2. Frank F. Gilmore, “Formulating Strategy in Smaller Companies”, in Harvard Business Review on Management, New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1975, pp. 156–171.
3. Ibid., p. 156.
4. Ibid., p. 171.
5. Ibid., pp. 164–170.
6. Ibrahim Abu Rabi, “A Post-September 11 Critical Assessment”, op. cit., pp. 21–45.
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