

ALIJA IZETBEGOVIĆ 'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO SOCIO-POLITICAL

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Abstract

This paper explores the socio-political and religious thoughts of Alija Izetbegović, a Bosnian intellectual-turned-politician and one of the Islamic thinkers in ex-Yugoslavia in the 20th century. It applies descriptive and analytical methods to examine the contributions of Izetbegović in the socio-historical context, with particular reference to the Young Muslims movement. It studies the tribulations he endured due to persecution by the Communist Yugoslav authorities. Izetbegović's thought is a response to a twofold equally negative influence on Muslim intellectuals and leaders of the time – the traditionalists whose emphasis on rituals obstructed the reform and the modernists who blindly followed what Izetbegović considered un-Islamic sources. As a solution, Izetbegović advocated attaining personal freedom through education and establishing closer ties among Muslim countries from Indonesia to Morocco.

Keywords: *Renewal, Islamic order, Young Muslims Movement, Socialist Yugoslavia, Post-Communist Yugoslavia, Pan-Islamism*

1. Introduction

Alija Izetbegović (henceforth, Izetbegović) was one of the Islamic thinkers in the Balkans in the 20th century and one of the few Muslim leaders who came to be known as an acclaimed intellectual. His intellectual engagement can be understood through the movement of the Young Muslims, whose ideas represented a moral awakening of Islamic thought in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

“This awakening sought to articulate Islam as a living faith that could translate the social ideals of equality and justice into reality. The Young Muslims movement distanced itself equally from fascism and communism, while it did not share with the traditional ‘ulamā their view of Islam as largely confined to rituals, or a religion primarily understood in terms of worship.”¹

His political engagement is understood through *The Islamic Declaration*, whose opening sentence is: “*Our goal: The Islamization of Muslims.*”² *The Islamic Declaration* is a call for change, a call to exit from passivity and hibernation, and a call for renewal and betterment of Muslims.³ In the introduction to *The Islamic Declaration*, Izetbegović explains the situation of Muslims. He emphasized that the Muslim world is in stagnation, passivity, dependence, backwardness, and poverty. Only Islamic thought can propel Muslims to this renewal, inspiring them to source the energy and self-discipline necessary for achieving this goal.⁴ The path that leads to this goal is “*the generating of Islam in all areas of personal individual life, in the family and the society, through the renewal of Islamic religious thought and the creation of a united Islamic community from Morocco to Indonesia.*”⁵ He argued that the Islamic world cannot be renewed without Islam because the purport of Islam about the existence of man and his place and purpose and his relations with God and fellow men constitutes a permanent and irreplaceable basis for the renewal of Muslims in the ethical, philosophical, ideological and political sense. Thus, he proposed a solution to the renewal: “*The alternative is stark: either a move towards Islamic renewal or passivity and stagnation. For the Muslim peoples, there is no third possibility.*”⁶

Izetbegović held that Islamic renewal is misunderstood by those who do not want change, those he called conservatives, and by those who want to make those changes but by modelling it on Western patterns and that both had misunderstand the essence of Islam. The former encapsulates Islam in the framework of theology and mysticism, closing it concerning science, while the latter, modernists, due to their vague idea about Islam and admiration of

everything that the West created and everything modern, believe that the destruction of traditional values and introduction of other 'modern' values and beliefs will lead to progress and that they would become as technologically advanced as the Western world.⁷

Izetbegović was born on August 8, 1925, in Bosanski Šamac in an aristocratic family, which migrated from Belgrade to Bosanski Šamac in 1868. His father, Mustafa, had five children with Alija's mother, Hiba, and two children from his first marriage. They moved to Sarajevo when Alija was two years old.⁸ Although his mother was a pious woman, he got a secular education. He attended the First Male Gymnasium in Sarajevo, a communist school. In the gymnasium, Alija received brochures that propagated communism. The doubts these brochures caused were overcome after two years of contemplation, and he returned to faith with new power.⁹ He studied German philosophers Hegel and Kant during this period, which influenced his intellectual development.¹⁰ Izetbegović continued schooling much later because of his engagement in the Young Muslims and subsequent arrest. Initially, he enrolled in agronomy but switched to law and graduated in 1956.¹¹

During communist Yugoslavia, he worked as a legal adviser, although he was twice jailed and convicted. He was one of the founders of the Democratic Action Party (SDA). In 1990, he became its first president. He was elected the first president of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina. In 2000, he withdrew from politics. He died on October 19, 2003, and was buried in Sarajevo.¹²

2. Background

Izetbegović's works attest to a scholarly investigation into his intellectual output. Izetbegović's works were published in Bosnian and, after translations into various languages, were marked by dynamic self-assertion of Muslim intellectuals' ideas regarding Muslims in the post-colonial world. It was marked by establishing of regional and international Muslim organisations, institutions of higher learning, and cultural and financial institutions that aspired to address Muslims' needs.

Since Izetbegović had his works published in communist Yugoslavia, critics competed with one another with scathing criticism. Most studies of Izetbegović's thought dealt with political aspects without an attempt to look into other aspects of Izetbegović's works objectively. This was true for Serbian orientalists Darko Tanasković and Miroljub Jevtić, who misrepresented Izetbegović's call for Muslim awakening labelling it 'Islamic fundamentalism,' 'radical Islam' and terrorism, warning Serbs and Christian Europeans

of atrocities that Bosniaks were about to commit on the eve of the war in Bosnia 1992-1995.¹³ In addition, Tanasković served as a high-ranking official of Slobodan Milošević's regime. This regime, including Milošević himself, was indicted for war crimes, ethnic cleansing, crimes against humanity, and other crimes perpetrated against Bosnian and Albanian Muslims. Miroljub Jevtić was a non-commissioned officer of the Yugoslav People's Army, whose officers of Serb ethnicity have been proven to have committed genocide against Bosnian Muslims. Hence, the attempt to incriminate Izetbegović, as is the case with these two Serbian 'experts' on Islam, was done by individuals who served the regime directly, and were involved in numerous crimes against Muslims in the Balkans.

3. The Objectives

The study presents Izetbegović's understanding of socio-political and religious principles. Regarding Izetbegović's political socio-thought, an objective is to determine the factors that influenced his ideas, starting from the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and World War II and the problems created for Muslim organisations. Moreover, establishing which intellectual currents within Islamic and Western thought have shaped the ideas of young Izetbegović is another objective. The establishment of communist Yugoslavia and the state's restrictions on freedom of expression and religious institutions presented a new set of challenges; thus, finding how these circumstances affected Izetbegović's writings is a fundamental goal. Finally, another topic of investigation is whether Izetbegović could implement his recommendations when he became the President of Bosnia and Herzegovina and how his ideas shaped him as a head of state.

4. The Methodology

The investigative tool that has been employed is analytical and descriptive, through readings of Izetbegović's works, monographs, articles, letters, interviews and speeches. Bearing in mind that Izetbegović's works have a multidisciplinary discursive character yet remain loyal to the main focus of this paper on socio-political and religious themes. Moreover, to establish a systematic interrelationship between Izetbegović's ideas, there is a need to use cross-referencing and synthesis as methods. Since Izetbegović positions Islamic thought as a synthesis between Eastern and Western thought, Christian and modern Materialist ethics and reasoning, and arts and sciences, a comparative method has been applied to present the findings.

5. Literature Review

Most academic writing on Izetbegović focuses on his socio-political thought in the Balkans and his imprisonment in Yugoslavia. Izetbegović's religious ideas are much less treated, perhaps because he did not have formal Islamic education and did not refer to the works of Islamic scholars, his contemporaries, or those from earlier generations. Below are the most relevant works on the impact of Izetbegović's socio-political and religious ideas.

In the absence of a detailed intellectual biography, until recently – any biography of Izetbegović, one of the most prolific living Islamic scholars from Bosnia, Enes Karić, in his article titled *Izetbegović (1925-2003)* attempted to fill the gap of Izetbegović's intellectual biography and contributions to contemporary socio-political thought. In addition, Karić offers insights into how Izetbegović's ideas influenced his practice as a high-ranking political leader and head of state.

Mustafa Imamović's *Historija Bošnjaka*¹⁴ is another source for the life of Izetbegović. This work of historical circumstances, particularly its part about the 20th-century history of the Bosniaks, provides a background of the challenges and the socio-political context in which Izetbegović lived.

The biographical work of Zehrudin Isaković offers additional reference to the life and work of Izetbegović, especially his contributions to socio-political ideas for reforming Bosnian Muslims and their political and religious rights.

Muhammad al-Ghazali's "Islam Between East and West: The 'Magnum Opus' of Alija Izetbegović"¹⁵ is another work dealing with Izetbegović's thoughts. Focusing on one of the works, the authors examine the central theses by Izetbegović and delve into the possibility of their application in contemporary Muslim societies. Although this paper refers to primary sources of Izetbegović, the above-reviewed works have served as references to Izetbegović's biography and intellectual contributions to the ideas of Muslims in Bosnia and worldwide.

6. Political Thought

Izetbegović was born during the Kingdom of Yugoslavia when Muslims were exposed to various forms of violence and persecution. Village communes were burned down, private property appropriated, and Muslims were killed, which resulted in a mass exodus to Turkey.¹⁶ The only resistance was the establishment of

democratic parties, the most prominent of which was the Yugoslav Muslim Organization, led by Mehmed Spaho, who became a minister in the government of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, which was to ensure protection against persecution and provide material support to religious institutions and compensation for confiscated properties. Nevertheless, the situation was chaotic and subject to the ruling elite's arbitrariness and wantonness.¹⁷

Until 1924, the Islamic Community was symbolically under the authority of Turkish Khilafat and *sheikh ul-Islām* from Istanbul, when Atatürk abolished *Khilafat* and Turkey ceased to interfere in the appointment of *Reis ulema* in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia.¹⁸ This caused polarisation between those attracted by Atatürk's reform and secular modernism, who in 1928 founded the organisation of allegedly progressive ideas, called the Reform – an organisation of progressive Muslims, and the Traditionalists who opposed these reforms. The Reformists brought religious upbringing into harmony with the spirit of the time, the unveiling of the Muslim woman and her emancipation, and the national awareness of the Muslim Bosniaks. Part of *ulamā*, led by Reis Čaušević seized these reformist ideas.¹⁹

This was the beginning of the division of Muslim intellectuals into 'modernists' and 'traditionalists', or as Izetbegović later called them, 'conservatives', and changes that would follow after the breakup of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. One change was the disintegration of the Kingdom and the arrival of the Communists, whereby *Sharī'ah* courts that dealt with personal issues and family law of the Yugoslav Muslims ceased to exist.²⁰ This period marked the last phase of applying the *Sharī'ah*.

In 1943, Izetbegović enlisted in military service. He did not want to join the Muslim militia - the Communist Partisans or the fascist collaborators, so he fled to his native Sava valley region and remained there hiding, until the war's end.²¹ During this war, Muslims were persecuted by the Ustashas - members of the Independent State of Croatia affiliated with the Axis Powers and from the Chetnik Movement, the Serb collaborators of the Fascists.²² Many documents testify to the genocide of Muslims during World War II.²³

The Young Muslims movement did not collaborate with the occupier or the partisans during the war. They were a small group and advocated for their rights, "*their point of view was Islam as the third way.*"²⁴ Their commitment to the Muslims' rights and understanding of Islam and Islamic society attracted Izetbegović.²⁵ Izetbegović developed these ideas in *The Islamic Declaration* and *Islam between the East and the West*.

His first contact with the Young Muslims was in 1940, although he formally joined it in 1943.²⁶ Initially, they were a small group of students who discussed Muslims' socio-cultural position. The attitudes were divided into two currents. The first was ideologically determined (Islamic) without interest in politics. The second was practically national (Bosnian), interested in the political position in Bosnia and issues of autonomy. The idea of educating the youth in the Islamic spirit brought both currents together for joint action, and the "Founding assembly" was held in March 1941.²⁷ However, the occupation stopped legalising the organisation.²⁸

The Young Muslims Movement dealt with the modern Muslim world's religious and political issues by modernising Islamic thought.²⁹ Their views on religion differed from what they had learned in *maktabs* and schools. The *hojjas* interpretation of Islam was based on rituals, neglecting its essence, while Young Muslims believed that Islam is a thought that could be modernised without losing its essence.³⁰ They took Islam as a political and ideological platform.³¹ As Izetbegović explains; Islam is a synthesis, a "third way" between the opposite options.³²

Observing the world through three worldviews – religious, materialistic and Islamic- Izetbegović notes emotional, ideological and political polarisation. However, one part is not affected by this polarization; the Muslim countries. In today's polarised world, Islam should assume its role as a 'mediating nation'; in this, he sees the meaning of the 'third way'.³³ He believes that such duality is projected in human life, and these contrasts are reconciling in man and Islam: "*Islam is synthesis, "third way" "between these two poles that mark everything that is human."*"³⁴ Islam, as understood by Izetbegović, was the "third way" in polarised Yugoslavia, the "third way" of duality or polarisation projected by communism and capitalism on the one side - representing a materialistic worldview and Christianity and Judaism on the other side - representing religious worldview. Islam was the "third way" to reconcile these two poles as a third global worldview – the Islamic worldview.

Soon after occupation, the movement joined the *imam's* association called El-Hidaja to ensure space for meetings and protection from *ustashas*; however, the association, over time, showed tendencies to control the work of the Young Muslims who discussed themes such as " 'Liberating Islam from Theology?' then 'Islam as a doctrine', 'Pure and degraded Islam', 'There is no clergy in Islam', 'Contradictions between Islam and Muslims', 'Has Islam succeeded' " ³⁵ etc. As a protest against the domination of El-Hidaja, Izetbegović, along with a part of Young Muslims, assisted Muslim *muhajirun* through the organisation Merhamet rather than El-Hidaja.

Other parts continued to work with El-Hidaja.³⁶ He wrote articles for newspapers Behar, Biser and Novi Behar.³⁷ Izetbegović became less active because of the alliance with El-Hidaja. He did not support this alliance because he criticised the *imams*, resetting their rigid interpretation of Islam, which, according to him, “*was to block its inward and outward development.*”³⁸ In 1944, he resigned as a member of Young Muslims.³⁹ After the war, Young Muslims and Izetbegović continued with their activities.⁴⁰

Soon after the war, the Communists arrested religious leaders who cooperated with the occupiers.⁴¹ They forced Muslims, especially religious leaders, to subordinate faith to the new society's secular identity. In this process, many Muslim intellectuals and religious persons were arrested.⁴² The Communists tried by all means to disrupt the work of the Young Muslims. In March 1946, Izetbegović was arrested together with other members. He was sentenced to three years and was among the most brutal prisoners and convicts on the death penalty, moved several times to other prisons and subjected to hard physical labour.⁴³ After his release in 1949, he continued clandestine engagement in the Young Muslims movement. The activist who secretly associated him with Hasan Biber was arrested and sentenced to death even though he did not admit that Izetbegović was again involved in its work.⁴⁴

The Communists continued with arrests and execution of the members of the Young Muslims. Izetbegović noted how the society in Yugoslavia hypocritically declared its commitment to social equality and justice. However, arguing about it was controversial. He dedicated himself to intellectual development and completed a law degree.⁴⁵

In 1969, he wrote the first draft of *The Islamic Declaration* and published it in 1970. Although focused on the socio-political situation, *The Islamic Declaration* was considered a threat to the socialist system because it called for the return of Islam. It put him into trouble resulting in his arrest in 1983. He was accused of reviving Islamic fundamentalism⁴⁶ and supporting counter-revolutionary acts against the social order of the SFRY.⁴⁷ Thus, he was imprisoned for 14 years.⁴⁸ A few years later, his sentence was reduced. He was released in 1988. Izetbegović comments: “*It was the two thousand and seventy-fifth day of my imprisonment. The years "that locusts have eaten" are behind me.*”⁴⁹

Islam Between East and West was written in 1946, but after his arrest and conviction, his sister hid the manuscript, and Izetbegović did not know about it and found it much later. He added new chapters to it, which were finally published in 1984 while serving

his sentence. In this book, Alija tried to explore the place of Islam in today's world of ideas and facts. To him, it seemed to be somewhere between Eastern and Western thought. He wanted to prove "*that some main and global ideas and values are common to all people.*"⁵⁰ While in prison, he wrote memoirs, letters and statements.⁵¹

After the collapse of communism, Izetbegović got an opportunity to implement his ideas. First, through the party's political program, he was one of the founders, and then as the President of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Soon after his release, he and fourteen other prominent intellectuals founded the Party of Democratic Action in 1990. The Party gained the highest votes in the first elections in post-communist Bosnia in November 1990. The majority of the votes came from the Bosniac Muslim majority. From 1990 to 2000, he held the highest executive posts, being either the President or a member of the Presidency. Izetbegović remained the President of the SDA until 2001 and honorary President until his death in October 2003.⁵²

The spread of Serbian nationalism incited by Slobodan Milošević in 1987, as a domino effect, caused the emergence of ethnonational parties in 1990 in other republics of Yugoslavia. The newly elected authorities seized on the new opportunities of a multi-party system, and soon the Yugoslav Federation collapsed. This awakening of national consciousness culminated in the war in Croatia and later in Bosnia and Herzegovina.⁵³ The horrors of this genocidal war cannot be described briefly.

Izetbegović fought to preserve Bosnia within Yugoslavia until the last moment,⁵⁴ emphasising that Bosnia and Herzegovina's independence was imposed on them. He said that when Yugoslavia began to disintegrate, there was no third choice: to remain in an incomplete Yugoslavia dominated by Serbia and Montenegro or to demand independence for Bosnia.⁵⁵ Bosnia did not work on the breakdown of Yugoslavia, instead tried to preserve Yugoslavia but with some reconstructions. Izetbegović said:

It appeared that Yugoslavia could not have been saved since she could not solve two main problems. Namely, she could not solve problems of freedom, could not give up the communist legacy and others, could not give up hegemony, Serb hegemony. Those were two diseases eating Yugoslavia; because of this, she disappeared from the historical stage. ... It was in our interest to preserve that country, of course, not under any conditions, but under conditions that would ensure freedom and equality of people. Unfortunately, every mention of equality was an offence for Serbs. That did not

succeed, and when something in history is over, there is nothing to grieve for.⁵⁶

Izetbegović believed in the democratic state of Yugoslavia. He knew this required forming democratic parties, and Bosnia and Herzegovina needed a pro-Bosnian and pro-Muslim political organisation. He thought about building this organisation based on JMO. However, considering that this organisation fell apart with the war in Yugoslavia in 1941, he decided to build a party different from JMO in terms of ability to withstand temptations,⁵⁷ although, as he commented, that SDA could be considered as a continuation of JMO in terms of the goals it advocates.⁵⁸ The idea of creating a political party dates back to his prison days. His vision was a Muslim party gathering all Muslim people in Yugoslavia.⁵⁹

Following the Referendum on February 29 and March 1 of 1992, and the proclaimed independence of Bosnia being supported by 99% of the votes,⁶⁰ the joy was short-lived, and the war broke out soon afterwards. Izetbegović recorded that he tried to save Bosnia and peace at all costs, but he wondered if this was possible, only to realise shortly afterwards that it was not. The time was coming to choose between the two. The war began in April 1992. At that time, Izetbegović was 67, facing new challenges; though he was unaware of this, it turned out to be the most turbulent period of his life.⁶¹

Izetbegović had a challenging task: to create something from nothing, extract the maximum possible from the limited possibilities, and to prevent the killings and the terrible suffering of the innocent people of Bosnia. During the war, he endured tremendous pressure to agree to partition of Bosnia into mini-ethnic states. Thus, when the opportunity to preserve the country in its historical borders was presented as the Dayton Accord, he seized it and signed the agreement that ended the war, ensuring Bosnia's sovereignty and territorial integrity.⁶²

After gaining independence for Bosnia and Herzegovina, Izetbegović established ties with Muslim countries. This was the solidarity of the Islamic world with the state of the Muslims in the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which resulted in significant financial assistance for the country's defence.⁶³ An example of such a visit to the Muslim world was Izetbegović's trip to Jeddah to attend an extraordinary meeting of OIC in December 1992, where a resolution adopted was sent to the UN to demand the lifting of the embargo on arms imports to Bosnia and Herzegovina.⁶⁴

Since the disintegration of Yugoslavia in 1990, and later during the war, Izetbegović was accused countless times that he is trying to create an Islamic state. He denied this accusation in many interviews, explaining that Bosnia and Herzegovina is a state of all citizens and that he would never opt for an Islamic order. Although his *Islamic Declaration* calls on the creation of an Islamic state, he believed that for Bosnia and Herzegovina, that was not possible:

... Our party stands for the creation of a civil republic. Nothing can unite us better than a civil republic because we cannot make a nation-state out of Bosnia. Let Serbia and Croatia go for creating such states; we do not have the conditions for that. We only can realize the ideal of a civil republic or a civil war! Islamic order is not possible!⁶⁵ I will say one more time that Bosnia is not only Muslim and that all those who think so among Muslims are undermining Bosnia. In Velika Kladuša, I pointed out that we do not want the Islamic Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina but the civil republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina.⁶⁶ Although Muslims are the majority of the people of the republic, there is not enough for what could be called the growth of "quality in quality." That "Arthritic" mass would be somewhere around seventy percent. Moreover, Muslims in BiH make up just over half of the population.⁶⁷ We refuse it and still insist on a civil republic, and we know why we do it. Instead of an Islamic republic, we seek complete religious freedom for all, equally for Muslims, Christians and others.⁶⁸

There was no place or time for an Islamic revolution in this war. Thus, Izetbegović was well aware of the actual situation and could not create an Islamic Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, notwithstanding his ideas in *The Islamic Declaration*. Although he could not implement the Islamic order in his own country, his contribution to Islamizing Muslims has significance for the Muslim world.

Izetbegović considered that the Islamic order represented the unity of faith and socio-political system and that Islamic revival could not begin without a religious revolution. However, a political revolution was necessary for its success, which meant that Islamic revival required a moral and social change based on religious reconstruction following Islamic principles and morality. The moral change he advocated required an internal cleansing of the corruption of nature, superstition, hypocrisy, laziness, the external purging of corrupt authority and non-Islamic customs, and the acceptance of fundamental Islamic moral attitudes. It was, as he said; the "Islamization" of people who were Muslims by name.⁶⁹

The general rule that Izetbegović formulated was that “*the Islamic movement should and can start to take over power as soon as it is morally and numerically strong enough to overturn not only the existing non-Islamic government but also to build up a new Islamic one.*”⁷⁰ He further emphasised that the movement with an Islamic order for the primary goal must first be a moral movement. As such, religious renewal can implement the Qur’ānic commands and prohibitions as entirely acceptable to Islamic society and justice. However, this renewal was insufficient for realising the Islamic order without the Islamic government. However, the first step in its realisation was the fundamental change in upbringing leading to political change. From this, it can be seen that his renewal of Islamic thought was impossible without a political revolution and overthrow, which gave a political tone to the Islamization he advocated.

Izetbegović argued that although Islamic principles that regulate relations between people and communities in Islamic society were immutable, the way Muslims organise society and government and conduct business was as varied as this world is subject to constant change.⁷¹

Izetbegović often shed some light on Muslim backwardness. On the occasion of the reception of the Faisal Award, Izetbegović concluded the acceptance speech by posing four questions, which in his view, were closely related to the weakness of Muslim countries. The first question was; why present-day Muslims disrespected time? Secondly, Izetbegović asked; how our towns are dirty and polluted when Islam concerns with the duty to keep the environment clean and unpolluted? Third, he found it strange that Muslim intellect and spirit have turned to mysticism and superstition despite the Qur’ānic injunctions to observe the world. Finally, Izetbegović questioned the issue of personality cults in the Muslim world, which contradicted the central emphasis on *tawhīd*. Izetbegović found it disturbing that despite clear precepts in the primary sources of Islam on how Muslims can improve their lives, the actions often run counter to the letter, which exacerbates the condition of Muslims and their desire to administer the matters following fundamental teachings of Islam. In Izetbegović’s opinion, whoever answered these questions would solve the problems that beset Muslim countries and communities.⁷²

In the section called ‘Political notes’ in his letters written while he was imprisoned, Izetbegović compares the criminal law of Communist Yugoslavia to *Shari’ah* law. Regarding criminal law and punishments, Izetbegović draws on his prison experience and legal education and training to note that criminal law is drafted by bureaucrats, office-based lawyers who have neither knowledge nor

interest in getting to know the circumstances and attitudes of inmates who serve sentences for various crimes.⁷³

Izetbegović notes that most inmates serving sentences for shoplifting and thefts showed no remorse or repentance. The exception to this is some inmates serving sentences for homicide and murders. With this observation, Izetbegović concludes that if he had ever been in charge of drafting a penal code, it would have been very similar to the Islamic penal code, as, in his view, that would be closer to the dispensation of justice.⁷⁴

Nevertheless, these memoirs and the attendant ideas were temporary because when Izetbegović was appointed into the highest office in Bosnia and Herzegovina, he did not even speculate on the possibility of drafting a law based on *Sharī'ah*. Therefore, as an intellectual and writer of books deemed seditious by the Yugoslav communist authorities, Izetbegović was more direct than his actions when he became head of state.

7. Religious Thought

Izetbegović is more a political activist than a religious scholar who felt the need for an Islamic renewal. His religious thought is closely related to his political thought. His religious ideas are primarily pointing to Islamic society based on Islamic order.

When Bosnia gained independence in 1992, Izetbegović, as the first president, opted for “*a secular state, based on modern Western democracy principles, where religion has its place in society on an equal footing; with other factors.*”⁷⁵ Although the underlying notion of The Islamic Declaration is the Islamic world arranged by *Sharī'ah*, Izetbegović did not opt for such an arrangement when he became its President.⁷⁶ Izetbegović believed that Bosnia was unique because of its different nationalities and religions. Bosnia needed to balance these aspects and create its peace-keeping solutions alone.⁷⁷

Izetbegović sees Islamic society as one of the basic assumptions of the Islamic order, which he defines as “*a unity of religion and law, upbringing and power, ideal and interest, the spiritual community and the state, willingness and force.*”⁷⁸ Islamic society is a Muslim community that lives by Islamic beliefs. It constitutes the content of the Islamic order, and the second fundamental presumption is the Islamic power which is its form.⁷⁹ Izetbegović emphasised that most laws in the West have not yielded positive results. He pointed out that it was necessary to renew Islamic thought to create an Islamic order in which the practical effect of the

Islamic laws was accepted as just and implicit because if there is no firm faith, there is no implementation.⁸⁰

Islamic society, according to him, cannot be based solely on socio-economic interests. However, it must contain a religious, emotional aspect of belonging (i.e., *jamaat* as the primary cell of the Islamic community). There should be no distinction between people on any other basis (i.e., socio-economic class and race), which does not include moral criteria because the Qur'ān guarantees the equality of men.⁸¹ Izetbegović believed that the functioning of the *zakāt* must be secured in every way, even by force, because the order of the *zakāt*, like an Islamic principle, must be a compulsory part of the Islamic order of today's Islamic society. On the other hand, the *ribā* is contrary to Islamic moral principles on which the Islamic order is based.⁸²

Religious and moral education is the foundation of the Islamic order. Therefore, it must be represented at all levels, from family to formal education. An Islamic society should prevent the impact of harmful, immoral and prohibited vices, such as alcoholism, prostitution, pornography, gambling and other forms of entertainment that conflict with Islamic principles.⁸³ Education in Islamic society, according to Izetbegović, should include the proper knowledge and all the acquired scientific and technological knowledge, as Islam has previously accepted and considered the knowledge of other civilisations. As such, education is "*the second most decisive factor for the faster emancipation of the Muslims world from its present inferior position,*"⁸⁴ and therefore, it requires radical changes, both qualitative and quantitative: the first is to relieve the school system of spiritual and material dependence on foreigners to serve the upbringing of Muslims, and the second to create complete conditions of education at all levels. He suggested using the mosque as a school as a first step in this reform.⁸⁵

Furthermore, Izetbegović pointed out that woman in Islamic society played a vital role in achieving Islamic renewal:

Today, Islamic societies are beset by the identity crisis, ever trying to resolve endless troubles. In this struggle, there are wins and losses. However, to achieve more wins than losses, it is necessary that this struggle, alongside the Muslim man, is also fought by the Muslim woman with her hands, her heart and mind since Muslim woman makes up half of the Islamic world. The Muslim woman will only be able to give birth to and raise a new generation and instil in this new generation faith in Islam and the future if she had previously been taught and exposed to the same values. As much as the Muslim

renewal does for the Muslim woman, she will contribute the same or even more to that renewal.⁸⁶

Izetbegović believed that Muslim woman was discriminated against due to adoption of unislamic belief systems and codes of conduct that were either ethnic or customary behaviour. He comments, “*Nothing will be more incorrect than to think that everything we can see in the Islamic world is by itself the Islamic way of life, i.e. the way of life that complies with the principle of the Qur’ān. This is even more relevant when we think of Muslim women. Even though shari’ah is only one, the position of woman was rather different during the centuries, and today is very different in some countries from Morocco through the Middle East, to Pakistan and Indonesia.*”⁸⁷ Therefore, Izetbegović suggested that the position of women in Muslim society must be changed; otherwise, she would not be able to bring the new Muslim generations capable of leading Muslims through Islamic renewal.⁸⁸

Izetbegović argued that Islam provided women equal rights, but not in the sense of the European understanding of it. Woman in Islam is equal to man regarding religious, ethical, moral and human duties.⁸⁹ He pointed out that civilisation neglects motherhood while Islam protects women by contributing to preserving the family, excluding all negative factors. However, he suggested that family and marriage law need to be re-examined to comply with present-day needs, especially regarding polygamy.⁹⁰

The recommendations for establishing the Islamic order were meant for those countries where Muslims are the majority. He said:

The Islamic order can only be established in countries where Muslims represent most of the population. If this is not the case, the Islamic order is reduced to more power (as the order element – an Islamic society – is missing) and may turn to violence... Muslim minorities within a non-Islamic state, provided they are guaranteed freedom to practice their religion, live and develop normally, are loyal and must fulfil all their commitments to that community, except those that harm Islam and Muslims.⁹¹

For Izetbegović, Islam was not only a religion but also an order that regulates the lives of Muslims in every aspect. Islamic society and state must be based on unchangeable principles without ignoring science and technology in constant change. Referring to verse 77 of *Sūrat al-Qaṣaṣ*, he explains that Muslims must “*willingly and in full awareness accept both these aspects of life as the human definition and meaning of his life on earth.*”⁹² The meaning of man’s

life is actualised through spiritual education and facilitating and improving life. It implies that a believer should not regulate his life only by faith and prayer but also by work and science.⁹³

Izetbegović argued that there is no coexistence between the Islamic religion and non-Islamic social and political institutions. He says, “*by claiming the right to order its world itself, Islam excludes the right or possibility of action on the part of any foreign ideology on that terrain. There is, therefore, no lay principle, and the state should both reflect and support religious, moral concepts.*”⁹⁴ He stated that Islam opts for the best possible order and emphasises that, as such, “*nothing which can make the world a better place may be rejected a priori as non-Islamic*”⁹⁵ and that openness towards nature meant openness towards learning. Izetbegović pointed out the connection between faith and science as the highest expression of the harmonised attitudes of morality and politics, spiritual and material.⁹⁶ From this, it is evident that Izetbegović attempted to show the relationships between Islam and the West, which according to him, was inevitable given the scientific changes.

Regarding the unity of Muslims, Izetbegović said that “*the tendency to gather together all Muslims and Muslim communities in the world was a natural function of the Islamic order,*”⁹⁷ which implied creating a unique Islamic community from Morocco to Indonesia, from Africa to Central Asia. He thought it natural for Muslims to unite through various forms to solve common problems and create economic, social, cultural and political structures for joint action. Moreover, the breakdown of the Arab world into small state communities was entirely unacceptable, resulting in disagreement on many issues and, at times, working against each other.

Izetbegović emphasised that the unity of all Muslims is founded in the Qur’ān and that, despite this, the problem of disunity exists, and most of all, as a consequence of inadequately educated leaders and leaders who are mainly educated in the West. This has led to nationalism and disunity. In some Muslim countries, the nationalist movements had even carried out the type of denationalisation because, as Izetbegović notes, conflicts with the past and the traditions of the people, and because these nationalist ideas were non-Islamic in content and origin,⁹⁸ “*Pan-Islamism has always sprung from the very heart of the Muslim people, while nationalism has always been imported goods.*”⁹⁹ Today’s problems faced by the Muslim world are challenging to solve individually. Therefore, Izetbegović emphasised the unification of all Muslims to address these problems and find a way out from passivity and stagnation: “*What the Arabs, Turks, Persians or Pakistanis cannot solve on their own, Muslims can, in one, joint, coordinated effort.*”¹⁰⁰

Izetbegović considered that division of people into those who believe and those who do not believe was superficial since this did not include a third group, which was undoubtedly numerous – those who declare as believers but do not belong to faith, although they pray and adhere to religious customs to some extent. As he says, the ones swayed by this-worldly joys and vices – in the complete absence of the fear of God and such an atmosphere raise their nest. According to Izetbegović, the existence of this third group gives transparent insight into the typical appearance of so-called verbal or formal faith in the Islamic world – with little genuine faith.¹⁰¹ He emphasised that “*the coming revolution of the Islamic world must be primarily a religious revolution. This revolution, having first taken place in the souls and hearts of people, is then able to make miracles and to achieve what today seems impossible.*”¹⁰²

Izetbegović contended that Islam’s approach to one thing was entirely new – “*that of its demand for the conjunction of faith and knowledge, morals and politics, ideals and interest. By recognising the existence of two worlds, the natural and the interior, Islam teaches that a man bridges the chasm between them*”¹⁰³ What can be new is our approach to Islam, our understanding of Islam, and Islam: its “approach” - or its principles, tenets, and standpoints does not change. They are always the same, unchangeable. This new approach of Islam which Izetbegović claims to be reflected in demand for unity of faith and science, morality and politics, ideal and interest, is also not something new in Islam: Islam has always united these aspects and regulated relations between these aspects of man’s life, combining them into one moderate whole. Emphasising that Islam recognised the existence of two worlds: the physical and the spiritual, he pointed out a gap between these two worlds and that Islam teaches that man represents the bridging of this dichotomy. However, there is no gap between these two worlds. Only a gap in the human mind does not acknowledge or discern a physical and metaphysical existence. Hence, the unity he refers to here is the unity of the human rational and spiritual aspect, which is essential for a Muslim in the present world to function and progress in both religious and intellectual terms, to fully develop in a religious sense without neglecting or receiving science and its achievements, and on the other hand to develop and improve in the domain of science intellectually.

Izetbegović referred to the verses of the Qur’ān without deeper analysis or recourse to any famous *tafsīr*. His reference point was Muslim modernists and modern Western philosophers. Hence, whenever Izetbegović uses Qur’ānic verses or *aḥādīth* to support his theses, it is not done with the precision and rigour of Islamic theologians, jurists and traditional scholars. Besides, Izetbegović began his *Islam between East and West* with a remark that he is not a

theologian or, to be more precise, that “*Islam between East and West is not a book of theology*,”¹⁰⁴ and his discourse does not follow any distinct Islamic methodology.

8. External Influence

Izetbegović's thought was influenced by philosophers and thinkers, such as Kant, Hegel, and even post-Hegelians as Marx - the social philosopher he frequently criticises.¹⁰⁵ In appraising the philosophy of history and the causes of the rise and fall of civilisation, Izetbegović is under the influence of Spengler, whom he extensively quotes. Izetbegović writes in *Memories: an autobiographical memoir*, that between the ages of eighteen and nineteen, he read all significant works of European philosophy and Bergson's *Creative Evolution*, Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* and Spengler's two-volume *Decline of the West* left a particular impact on him.¹⁰⁶ Another source of Izetbegović's thought comes from Russian and French literature, particularly when he critically examines the scientific reductionism and materialism of the modern West and the way Izetbegović compares or instead places Islam in between the East, or religion, and the West or science and civilisation is roughly posed as the Hegelian thesis-antithesis-synthesis triad. This Hegelian influence is apparent in numerous sections of *Islam between East and West* and *Notes from prison: 1983-1988*.¹⁰⁷ Indeed, Izetbegović does not precisely use this terminology as Hegel did, but the set-up of premises and the manner of reasoning is strikingly similar. Izetbegović's focus on the external, socio-political aspect of the Muslims rather than their inner dimension (knowledge, ethics, human nature, philosophy in general) reveals his adoption of some views of social philosophers, primarily American pragmatists and the Marxist and existentialist thought, which is more evident by his frequent reference to authors such as Jaspers, Camus, Russel, and Marcuse.¹⁰⁸

Izetbegović had an unconventional writing style in several of his works, later published as his notes, especially in the notes written secretly in prison and published under the title *Notes from prison: 1983-1988*. These works are written in a sketchy, note-taking manner that he was supposed to refine later, yet it was never done for some reason. Furthermore, he held that, what he considers facts and ideas are mostly clustered under the idea of what he calls *the theory of the third way*. The mode of reasoning and arriving at conclusions, mainly through establishing the common ground between two opposing ideas, directly influences Hegelian dialectics. However, how he chooses these opposing ideas across disciplines, from art and literature through philosophy, history and social sciences to natural sciences and religion, bears testimony to his erudition.

There are dynamic realities of civilisation and history. There are also static realities of arts and religion. Thus, Islam is a synthesis of two antitheses or the third way between the two poles that mark everything related to human beings and our world.¹⁰⁹ Izetbegović notes that since he uses examples, allusions and figurative language, he was wary of the reaction to his work by the specialists, those who use 'pedantic analyses'. With the admission that his works are in many places incoherent, incomplete and unrefined, he reminds the reader that, in many instances, he resorts to the use of metaphors and that the way he uses Islam, Christianity and Judaism is only intended to be metaphorical; thus readers should bear this in mind and avoid literalist approach to his works.

Izetbegović does not refer to classical Islamic thinkers: most of his references are Muslim scholars who lived a century and a half or two centuries since his writings were published, mainly from Fazlur Rahman's *Spirit of Islam*.¹¹⁰ He is influenced by Hegel's phenomenology of the spirit and how it evolves in history and society. Although Izetbegović does not state it, his notion of a dichotomy between the conservatives and the modernists does not seem to apply to many Islamic classical scholars, philosophers, theologians and Sufis. The Muslim Brotherhood has impacted Izetbegović's views on activism and the role of Muslim associations. Izetbegović advocated activism to establish political parties and participate in elections. Towards the end of the 1970s, Izetbegović once again drew on pan-Islamism as it was elaborated by scholars such as Muhammad Iqbal and Sayid Qutb.¹¹¹

9. Contemporary Islamic and Political Thought

Izetbegović's thought can be characterised as a contribution to contemporary Islamic political thought. This is reflected in his ideas of renewal of Islamic thought, establishing an Islamic order in countries where Muslims are the majority, and creating a unique Islamic community from Morocco to Indonesia. Izetbegović presented these ideas in *The Islamic Declaration* and suggested how they could be realised. Some of them are related to the arrangement of a state where Muslims are the majority, regulating the relationship of Muslim communities towards the state and other religious communities, and some of the main principles of establishing the Islamic order. Moreover, other suggestions concern the tasks of the Islamic order in education and the preservation of the family and the Muslim woman, the recommendations for the minority Muslim communities, the attitude of Muslims towards the minorities and how to organise Muslims within a state.¹¹² Izetbegović expounds more as a reformer of Islamic societies and states.¹¹³ Izetbegović was the first

thinker in the Balkans who used the term 'Islamization'. He used the term around the same time as Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas.

The political philosophy of Izetbegović can best be understood from his memoirs, interviews and speeches, which reflect the political memory of this most influential political leader of Bosnia and Herzegovina in the 20th century.¹¹⁴ His contribution to political thought and practice is reflected in the formation of the SDA, advocating for the national rights of Muslim Bosniaks, and his participation in establishing peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina. He was one of the founders of the SDA in 1990, one of whose objectives was to preserve Yugoslavia as a democratic community of nations and nationalities.¹¹⁵

Izetbegović's intellectual output as a leader of an influential political party and head of state has manifested in many directions. One of the contributions is the establishment of a state that will uphold the rule of law,¹¹⁶ a state that will uphold equality for all ethnic groups, where no one will be discriminated against based on their ethnicity, religion and political conviction,¹¹⁷ and a state where the leading Muslim party SDA will ensure no one ever endangers Muslims and tries to perpetrate discrimination and crimes, particularly not the crime of genocide.¹¹⁸

Izetbegović struggled for the national cause of Muslims,¹¹⁹ which they did not have for decades.¹²⁰ The program included not only Bosnian Muslims but also all Muslims in former Yugoslavia who, after the collapse of communism, were left in Serbia and Montenegro, particularly in Sandžak. Moreover, he advocated Muslims' cultural and historical autonomy in the Sandžak.¹²¹ He justified this by observing that Muslims living in the Sandžak have endured persecution and were forcefully dispersed through waves of migrations to Turkey, Bosnia, Macedonia and other countries.¹²² Furthermore, he and his political party (SDA) advocated reforming the education system to remove the ideological dogmas and prejudices from the period of communism. Additionally, SDA advocated making primary and secondary level education compulsory and accessible.¹²³

The defence of Bosnia and Herzegovina is undoubtedly the most critical of Izetbegović's political and historical contributions. Izetbegović managed to preserve Bosnia's sovereignty despite pressures from Croatia, Montenegro, Serbia, and the world. As the army's supreme commander, Izetbegović shaped Bosnia and Herzegovina's defence strategy, fighting against aggression and genocide and commissioning war crimes against the enemy.¹²⁴

10. Conclusion

The discussion above has highlighted Izetbegović's contributions to advancing political and religious thought. It referred to several details from the introduction, highlighting key points. Other contributions in various areas of life become apparent. The discussion is centred on Izetbegović's perspective and contribution to modern Islamic thinking. Another standout of the report is his concern over the multileveled polarisation of the planet.

It was also emphasised that Izetbegović's theory that polarised ideological camps presents an extreme and compartmental view of the world and violently attempt to impose it on others, particularly those who adhere to the opposing ideology, was studied.

Izetbegović's idea of the necessity of pan-Islamism - his suggestion is as bluntly stated as most of his writings are presented - reflects his belief that the construction of prosperity and freedom for every Muslim country is, at the same time, the construction of personal freedom and welfare for each Muslim country.

The paper also focused on his religious ideas regarding the ummah's unity, equality, Muslim women's role, and their rights. How the western philosophers impacted his philosophy is also a crucial aspect of the paper.

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