

Determination of Ramadan and Eid al-Fitr And the Universal Islamic Calendar

The debate over the method that decision makers should use to determine the beginning of Ramadan and Eid al-Fitr continues. In 1939, Shaikh Ahmad Shakir proposed a Global Islamic Calendar (GIC) in an attempt to unify Muslims. By 2010, a minimum of 20 conferences were held and another 8 different GICs have been suggested for the same purpose.

In North America, the lack of an agreed upon authority representing all North American Muslims has led to discord and decision makers of each community took the task of determining the start and the end of Ramadan using different methodologies. .

The following is a summary of the main proposed GICs to date. It is meant to educate our fellow Muslims about the ongoing efforts related to the subject. It is imperative to note that merely stating Prophetic hadith or reporting of astronomical calculations can lead to confusion and unnecessary tension, if these hadith and astronomical data are not properly understood.

Debate among Jurists:

Should astronomical calculations be considered? If so, to what extent?

If the new moon is seen in one region, should the sighting of this new moon hold for the residents of other regions where the moon was not sighted? If the answer is no, then how are the boundaries of each region to be defined?

Debate among Astronomers:

What are the parameters to be considered when predicting the visibility of the crescent?

Should the calculation of the conjunction be geocentric (conjunction with the center of the Earth) or topocentric (conjunction with the local place of the observer)?

Debate among/between Jurists and Astronomers:

How does one reconcile between the hadith that calls upon the Muslims to fast and to break the month of fast based on the sighting of the moon and the undeniable scientific facts which may at times seem to contradict the need for visual sighting?

Outcomes of the Ongoing Debate:

The following methodologies are based on crescent visibility. They aim at reconciling hadith with calculation and they are proposed as plausible Universal Islamic Calendar.

According to these calendars/methodologies, the beginning of the Islamic lunar month starts if:

A. First view: uni- Zonal

1. *Um al-Qura (proposed in Rabat 2006 and 2008, also adopted by ISNA Fiqh Council):*

The conjunction occurs before sunset and the moon sets after sunset

2. *Ahmad Shakir (proposed in a letter entitled "the beginning of the Arabic months" 1939):*

The moon sets after sunset in Makka

3. *Shaukat/Abdurazak (proposed in Rabat 2006 and 2008):*

The conjunction occurs before 12 Universal Time (UT)

4. *Jalo (proposed in Rabat 2008):*

The conjunction occurs before 12 p.m. Makka time

5. *Libyan methodology (proposed Rabat 2006):*

The conjunction occurs before fajr time (problem: which fajr to consider?)

B. Second view: Bi-Zonal

1. *Guessoum (proposed in Abu Dabi 2006):*

Divide the globe into two; Western region (America(s)) and Eastern region (the rest of the continents):

For the Western region, the conjunction occurs before 12 UT

For the Eastern region, the conjunction occurs before the fajr of Makka

2. *Qudhat (proposed in Abu Dabi 2006):*

Divide the globe into Western and Eastern regions based on the farthest point in the East where the moon could be sighted.

For the Western region, the next day is the beginning of the month.

For the Eastern region, the day after is the beginning of the month.

3. Odeh (Jakarta 2007):

Divide the globe into Western and Eastern regions based on the line of longitude 20°.

For the Western region, the moon could be sighted in any location.

For the Eastern region, the moon could be sighted in any location.

Case Study: When is Eid al-Fitr 1432h?

The geocentric conjunction (astronomical new moon) is on Monday August 29th, 2011 at 3:04 UT. The crescent visibility curve of the new moon is shown in the following two figures using two different criteria. On Monday August 29th, the new crescent can be easily visible in the Southern part of South America and it could be seen by optical aid in certain parts of North America and the South African continent.

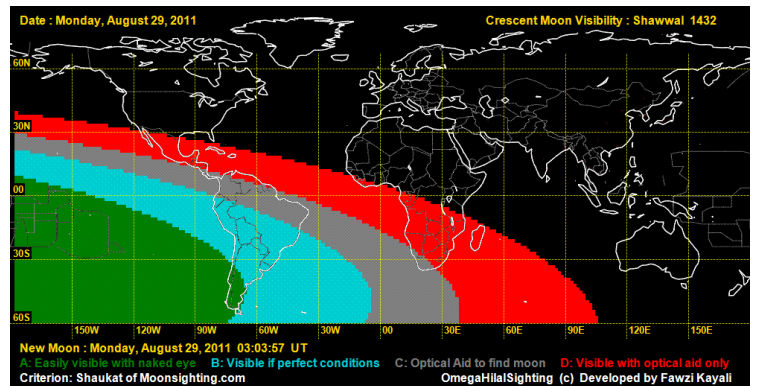
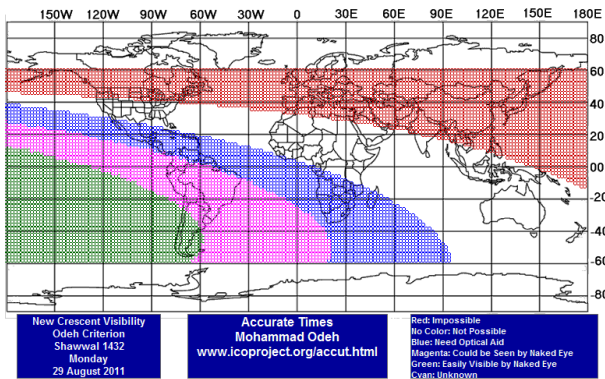


Figure 1 – Eid crescent visibility according to M. Odeh

Figure 2- Eid crescent visibility according to K. Shaukat

Table 1 -Eid Day according to Global Islamic Calendar

Type of Calendar	Methodology	Eid Date
Uni-Zonal	Um al-Qura	Tue. Aug. 30
	ISNA Fiqh Council	Tue. Aug. 30
	Shaukat (moonsighting.com)	Tue. Aug. 30
	Libyan methodology	Tue. Aug. 30
Bi-Zonal	Odeh (accurate Time)	Tue. Aug. 30
	Guessoum	Tue. Aug. 30

Table 2 - Eid Day according to Plausible Sighting of the Moon in different types of Matla' (Horizon).

Type Matla' (horizon)	Respective Region	Eid Date
Ittihad al-matali' (uni-horizon)	Anywhere in the globe	Tue. Aug. 30
	Any region that shares part of the night with North America	Tue. Aug. 30
Ikhtilaf al-matali' (multiple horizons)	Canada and USA	Tue. Aug. 30 OR Wed. Aug 31
	Canada, US and the Caribbean	Tue. Aug. 30 OR Wed. Aug 31
	North America	Tue. Aug. 30 OR Wed Aug 31
	North and South America	Tue. Aug. 30

Where to stand?

The decision depends extensively on whether we stand for (a) *ijtihad al-metal'* (unit-horizon) or *ikhtilaf al-matali'* (multi-horizons) and on, (b) the Identification of the respective region of each type of horizon.

(a) Uni-horizon or multi-horizon

Multi-horizons is one opinion in the Shafi'e school of thought. It is adopted by some local mosques and Islamic organizations in North America.

Uni-horizon is the opinion supported by the Hanafi, the Maliki and the Hanbali schools of thought. It is also adopted by some mosques and Islamic organizations in North America

Uni-horizon is also the recommendation of many reputed fiqh councils including but not limited to:

1. The third conference of the Assembly of Islamic Research, Cairo, Egypt: September, 1966.
2. The Assembly of Muslim Jurists, Malaysia: April, 1969
3. The Assembly of Muslim Jurists of the Islamic Summit Conference, Istanbul, Turkey: November, 1978.
4. The Assembly of Muslim Jurists of the Islamic Summit Conference held in Amman, Jordan: 1987.

(b) Identification of the respective region of each type of horizon:

Multi-horizon refers to the horizons of particular communities who are residing in the same region. Each community has its own local horizon. If the moon is seen in their local horizon, the rule cannot extend to other communities.

The local horizon for North American Muslims specifically may refer to all North America or part of it such as Canada and USA or Canada, USA and the Caribbean.

Uni-horizon has three main identifications:

1. One horizon for all Muslims as reflected in the uni-zonal GIC. This means, if the moon is sighted/can be sighted in one location, the rule holds for all other Muslims wherever they are (assuming they have the news of the visibility of the new moon)
2. Two horizons, West and East, as reflected in the bi-zonal GIC. This means, the rule of the new moon holds for the Muslims of the horizon where it is sighted only.
3. The horizon is based on the commonality of the night/part of the night. This means, if the new moon is sighted in one region, the rule holds for any other region as long as it shares at least part of the night.

Consequently, those who rely on multi-horizon (North American Muslim horizon in our case) may declare Eid on August 30th or August 31st depending on their assessment of the moon sighting to be reported on August 29th. As for those who adopt uni-horizon, Eid is on August 30th.

Conclusion

Samaha (magnanimity) is the main characteristic of the Islamic Shari'ah and the unity of Muslims is its High Objective. We, Northern America Muslims, are in utmost need to adopt and promote a methodology that takes into consideration the above two aspects of the Islamic religion; a methodology that stands midway between sternness and indulgence, excessiveness and negligence. Such methodology should bring ease, remove hardship, project our unity and express our strength. A reliable Global Islamic Calendar that reconciles between hadith and science is, in my opinion, the most appealing methodology that meets our needs and helps us move forward. Further, it removes or at the very least minimizes discord and allows us to be more focused on other challenging issues such as maintaining our Islamic identity.

Given the above and since we stand for uni-horizon for years Eid will be Insha Allah on Tuesday August 30th 2011.

Allah knows best
Imam Shaikh Hosni Azzabi
August 18, 2011