

Outlook for the Muslim world

By Maqbool Ahmad Bhatti

INTROSPECTION and self-analysis among Muslims usually mark the holy month of Ramazan, and currently thoughts about the state of the ummah are far from cheerful. The sole superpower is engaged in hostilities in Afghanistan and Iraq, two countries it targeted as a part of the war against terrorism, after it suffered the most serious attack on its mainland on September 11, 2001.

It attributed this attack to Muslim terrorists acting under the orders of Saudi dissident, Osama bin Laden, from his safe haven in Afghanistan. Even before the 9/11 terrorist attack on the US, western analysts had begun treating Islam as the successor threat to communism following its defeat in the cold war. The practical implementation of this concept took place in our own region, when Pakistan, that played the role of a front-line state against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan, was placed under the sanctions flowing from the Pressler Law, in 1990, and not only was all US aid cut off, but even delivery of arms paid for was stopped. India now emerged as the strategic partner of the US, because it shared Washington's perception of the threat from resurgent Islam.

As is well known, the US attitude towards the Islamic world was largely shaped by Israel, which felt a security threat from the support of the Islamic countries to the people of Palestine, who were struggling for their inalienable rights guaranteed in UN resolutions passed in 1967 and 1973. Regardless of which political party was in power in the US, the security of Israel has remained a constant plank of US foreign policy. Not only was Israel's development of nuclear capability facilitated and abetted, but the rigour of the non-proliferation regime was also applied with special harshness to the Muslim countries.

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find this approach compatible with its unilateralist approach, it does not address the roots of the problem of terrorism, which lie in injustice, whether political or economic. The plans of his neo-conservative advisers seek to ensure US hegemony in the world, in the 21st century, but the US experience, after pre-emption in Afghanistan and Iraq, has already raised doubts, whether the Bush doctrine will be conducive to peace and stability in the world.

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would use its power and influence to bring about regime change, and install pliable governments. After Iraq and Afghanistan, pressure is being brought to bear against Syria and Iran, while rebellion in western Sudan has opened up possibilities of regime change there.

The US is relying on pliant regimes, such as those in Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, to pursue its agenda. However, pressure is being maintained against these friendly governments, by hints of resort to force, should they falter in fighting extremism and fundamentalism. In a television debate on a news channel associated with the conservative elements, experts were asked to identify the most serious threats to the US. The threats identified pertained to either the oil

It is pertinent to mention that President George W. Bush has an ideological approach that is in accord with the evangelists in the US, who constitute only 20 per cent of the American Christians. The evangelists believe that they have to help Israel win a total victory in the Middle East, for only that would make possible the coming of Christ. The evangelists are committed to supporting Israel against the Muslims surrounding the Jewish State. However, Islamic scholars have reacted to this approach by pointing out that historically, Islam has been more tolerant and accommodating than either the Jewish or Christian faiths.

The conduct of research into the Old and New Testament reveals that acts of great cruelty were authorized against enemies both in the times of Moses and the early Christian period. It is stated in the Old Testament that the Jewish army, in waging war against the Midians, killed all

the men, and burned their towns and villages. They were ordered to keep the young girls for themselves. Yet Muslims do not accuse Moses and his followers of cruelty, but revere him as a prophet of God.

During two millenniums of Christian domination, many pogroms and "final solutions" were carried out against the Jews. In his *History of the Jews*, Solomon Graetz writes that Europe, and western civilization had failed to treat the Jews fairly. On the other hand, under the Muslims, "the world Jewry entered into a new period of physical and intellectual expansion."

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that swords be used against enemies. Yet the Muslims have never called Jesus a violent man. Indeed, the Quran opposes compulsion in religion and considers war to be abhorrent, except in self-defence. The Christian attitude, during the Crusades, was marked by massacres, for instance in the conquest of Jerusalem. The record of Muslim conduct is much more humane.

Apart from a faulty and prejudiced view of Islam, the western attitude is determined by a resolve to maintain their hegemony, and to exploit the rich energy resources of the Islamic world. In response, the Islamic world, which is far from being a monolith, needs to adopt an attitude of enlightened moderation, in keeping with the ideology and spirit of Islam. However, with

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Afghanistan was abandoned, perhaps in the expectation that the Mujahideen factions, who were all Islamic oriented, might bleed each other to a point at which secular forces might take over. This did not happen, and instead, the Taliban, who had fought against Moscow's occupation forces, took over most of the country. The US had drawn up plans to uproot their power, after they offered sanctuary to Osama bin Laden, who had now launched a war against US domination in the heartland of Islam, after the Gulf War of 1991.

Since 9/11, the US war against terrorism has assumed the character of a war against the Islamic world, since Islamic fundamentalism is seen to breed militancy, that leads advocates of Islamic resurgence to launch a "jihad" against powers considered inimical to them. However, while the US under President Bush may

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The US is relying on pliant regimes, such as those in Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, to pursue its agenda. However, pressure is being maintained against these friendly governments, by hints of resort to force, should they falter in fighting extremism and fundamentalism. In a television debate on a news channel associated with the conservative elements, experts were asked to identify the most serious threats to the US. The threats identified pertained to either the oil wealth of Saudi Arabia or the nuclear weapons of Pakistan falling into the hands of fundamentalists. Thus contingency planning of the sole superpower continues to keep such exigencies in view.

The way the situation has evolved in Afghanistan and Iraq has led many western observers to conclude that the Bush doctrine of pre-emption is a thinly veiled assertion of a neo-colonialist approach, which is not likely to be palatable in this day and age. Indeed, Iraq is bleeding the US militarily and even financially, and world public opinion disapproves of this policy that is animated by hubris and arrogance. The Islamic world is resentful of the assumptions made about the religion of Islam, whose history brings out that it has preached and practised tolerance and peace.

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While the immediate outlook for the ummah may be daunting, we have to stand together and call for an order based on principles, rather than power. The Islamic world must show resilience and a capacity to adjust to realities. Extremism and terrorism cannot be the answer, since they are manifestations of despair. Our most urgent need is to build up our human resources, through education, and technology, while cherishing the eternal values of Islam, "the religion of peace and moderation".