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**The emerging dynamic**

Freedom struggles around the world, principally in Palestine and Indian Occupied Kashmir, have been up against stiff challenges after the 9/11 apocalypse. While the window for the acceptance of occupied and oppressed people’s right to self-determination was already narrow before 9/11, the epoch-making attacks on the Twin Towers shut it down completely.

Thanks to the framing of the ‘war on terrorism’ as a ‘moral crusade’ by the Western media meant to protect the Western values of democracy, pluralism, and human rights, ‘terrorism’ became the governing principle of domestic and foreign policies.

This obsession with terrorism, militancy and jihad that expressed itself in various forms and manifestations practically eliminated the already blurred lines between legitimate freedom struggles and militancy.

The political executives who launched the global fight against terrorism shaped the major discourse in a way that further delegitimised these struggles for the rights enshrined in the UN Charter. The media dutifully picked up the leads and invested its PR capital to further popularise these discourses. In doing so, it failed to perform its core function of scrutinising the executives’ actions.

Resultantly, the armed struggle against oppressive regimes such as Israel and India was summarily rejected and readily defined as an act of terrorism, much to the bewilderment of the oppressed people. The discourse against what was propagated as militancy and terrorism was fed mutually by the political and media elites that saw potential electoral and commercial gains coming their way.

The situation was thus ripe for the Indian and Israeli governments to put their diplomatic machinery into action mode, a task they performed to near perfection. In this endeavour, they were greatly aided by massive goodwill, political connections and the lure of markets. Driving this consensus was the alignment of perspectives on the dangers posed by ‘Islamic’ militancy. ‘Political’ Islam was singled out for its ‘role’ in providing ideological underpinning to the transnational organizations such as Al-Qaeda. Hence the unending obsession with lumping terrorism and Islam together.

Successive Indian governments invested their political and diplomatic clout in branding the Kashmiris’ heroic resistance as ‘cross-border terrorism’ in an effort to tarnish Pakistan in the eyes of the international community. This was a clever Indian ploy to milk the fertile situation to avoid scrutiny for its human rights abuses in the occupied valley.

This explains why India has been getting away with its actions in Occupied Kashmir, the occasional rap on the knuckles from the human rights organizations notwithstanding. It also explains the hardening of its stance on making ‘cross-border terrorism’ the overriding agenda item if any discussions with Pakistan have to take place. Modi’s act of withdrawing the special status of Occupied Kashmir by repealing Article 370 of the Indian constitution is grounded in the impunity his regime has been granted by the powerful capitals in the West.

In case of the Palestinian issue, Israel has enjoyed broader support for its actions in the occupied territories, be it expansion of the illegal settlements, the unleashing of its fierce war machine on hapless citizens or making life a living hell for Palestinians in besieged Gaza. Tel Aviv has indulged in war crimes with abandon at a time of its own choosing.

Today, even the practice of paying lip service on the part of the Western governments against Israeli atrocities is disappearing fast. The longest-serving Netanyahu government framed the whole discourse in terms of terrorism and religious militancy and in loaded political language. Its narrative has found greater traction in an environment of populism, xenophobia and a surge in nationalism that now marks much of Europe and North America.

In such a dire situation, the odds are quite daunting for the struggling people of Palestine and Kashmir. They are not only having to fight oppressive regimes with brute military power at their disposal but also wage the battle of hearts and minds in the court of international opinion.

As recent events have indicated, public opinion, if not governments, is moved at the sight of gross rights violations. The international censure that Modi’s India was subjected to in the wake of the annexation of Occupied Kashmir was unprecedented, to put it mildly. While governments were largely not bothered by what India did, their publics could not remain impervious to a series of dehumanising actions that New Delhi undertook to ‘bring the situation under control’.

Likewise, the Israeli atrocities on Palestinians have led to a new global consciousness powered as it is by the images of death and destruction that emanated from the destroyed buildings in Gaza. The new dynamic on display has to do with how the oppressed present their case.

It is therefore important for them and those who support their causes to keep highlighting the abuses of their fundamental human rights in a systematic manner. The oppressors not only need to be named but also continually shamed. They need to engage with all such organizations that deal with human rights to tell their stories to a wider world.

The comparison of these struggles with Black Lives Matter and anti-apartheid movements provides the reference point for the global community to form association with these causes. The 213-page Human Rights Watch report has done more to expose Israel than the OIC or even the UNSC.

The oppressed need to be alive to the new dynamics that have the potential to shape their struggle in an age of social media. Their fight has just entered a new phase.

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