

Spectre of fundamentalism

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Another spectre is hovering over the western world after the demise of Soviet communism, this time not from within but from without ie from the rising-tide of chaotic religious revivalism in the East. From an "ally of the free world against communism", the world of Islam is now erroneously being portrayed as an outlaw of modern civilisation. The racist view of "clash of civilisations" is now finding an expression in selectively picking horrendous terrorist acts by a handful of adventurist-jihadis, not the Zionists, who in fact reinforce western hegemony, as has happened now and Pakistan was left with no option but to fall in line by fatefully breaking the khaki-mulla nexus.

Of course, by turning its back on Taliban, a mature Pakistan has saved itself from meeting the fate of Iraq. The choice was too difficult, but mind prevailed over the heart while saving Pakistan at the cost of injuring the deep sensitivities of the masses. The carpet-bombing will crush some of the sanctuaries to give birth to many, unless the grievances of Muslim masses are not addressed and the US showed its readiness to redress some of the most visible injustices being committed against the Muslim people, such as Palestine and Kashmir.

It is ironic to believe that a fundamentalist bloc, if it emerged, will struggle for cultural ascendancy over modern West with rudimentary arsenals the way the Muslims tried to do against medieval Europe between 632 and 1683, when Moors conquered Spain and the Muslims failed to capture Vienna for the last time.

While the Military Industrial Complex in the United States desperately needs an 'enemy' to justify its existence, the West-European nations also invoke the bogey of fundamentalism to thwart what they perceive a threat from the eventual waves of emigrants, in consequence of a possible destabilisation of the Muslim societies at the hands of revivalists. However, faced with national betrayals, underdevelopment, backwardness, dictatorships, and the Western arrogance, the Muslim world is at the threshold of a turning point in its history. The Muslim masses feel a deep sense of yearning for a utopian state of the past when faced with hopelessness and helplessness in their present. A real threat of quasi-fascism to the developing Mus-

lim societies emerges when in their revolutionary frenzy, the Muslim masses find an appeal in the reactionary ideology of the 'Mullas'. If the world is to be a safe place the West must help in not letting this lethal combination emerge by humanising itself towards the Muslim masses.

Interestingly, the problem of striking a dialectical balance between 'modern' and 'traditional' faced by the Muslims is the same as faced by the colonised people of the East, earlier. The peripheral societies both in ancient ages and in the modern times, such as Czarist Russia and China, had always provided fertile social soil for revolutionary changes. However, the former resulted in the inquisition and the later in totalitarianism. Similarly, the post-colonial societies are faced with a dilemma of a bleak prospect of development under the paradigm of modernisation in an unjust world economic order and a dreadful reversion of semi-modern societies to medieval times of a semi-pastoral and semi-natural economy, due to economic and social breakdown, as happened in Afghanistan. Both the US and the Soviets left after causing havoc and left Pakistan and other states in the region to suffer from the debris of extremism and internecine conflict.

The evolution of most of the Eastern nations has not been normal. The colonial intervention not only disrupted their archaic structures and articulated their productive forces to suit the design of western colonialists, it also marginalised their historical being as people and disrupted a natural course of normal evolution. Any effort at modernisation by transcending the material limits or by skipping certain stages of historical development comes in conflict with the equally important effort at rediscovering a lost cultural identity rooted in history, and vice versa. Hence the conflict between the modernists, often seen as westernised and the traditionalists, dubbed as fundamentalists. But different sectors of underdeveloped societies of the South in general and Muslims societies in particular are so much interwoven, and are historically placed so differently that it would be a historical view to expect the repetition of the peculiar transition from feudalism/tribalism to capitalism which took place in West Europe.

A heterogeneous development characterised by multiplicity of contradictions accumulated over centuries and reinforced by the overlapping of many stages of development in human

society, creates a very volatile social environment favourable to neo-Bonapartism in general and fundamentalism in particular in the Muslim societies. The erstwhile struggle for hegemony between the two superpowers in a bipolar world not only thwarted the democratic process but also helped in propping up and in sustaining the undemocratic client regimes. Both of them also helped in building up the opposition against each other's client.

It is interesting to note that the US, especially in the days of McCarthyism and Reaganism, exploited religion against Communism. John Foster Dulles went to the extent to declare Islam as "our best ally against Communism in Asia" and President Reagan with the help of all kinds of clergy launched a crusade against what he termed an atheist evil empire. While the US supported all the fundamentalists including the Ikhwan-ul-Muslameen, Afghan Mujahideen and Jamaat-e-Islami against the nationalist and secular elements, except in Iran and oil rich Sheikdoms, it is now confronted with the challenges of turncoat-fundamentalism in the post-cold war times. The lead was taken by the Iranian Revolution that provided an anti-West direction to the Islamic revivalists. It was followed by America's prolonged Afghan war against the Soviets that produced a mass of jihadis in the Muslim world, the Taliban and Osama being a by-product.

In the post-cold war world, the positions of both the erstwhile opponents in the Muslim societies, the left-oriented people and the fundamentalists, have astonishingly converged, despite irreconcilable ideological viewpoints. While the fundamentalists have turned against their masters in the West, especially the US, the dogmatic left in some countries, such as Pakistan, Palestine, India and Lebanon, has embraced fundamentalists in a common struggle against "imperialism" by abandoning its principal consideration of modern and democratic polity while taking some relief from adventurism of terrorist fringe.

On another level, while the nation-state in the developed societies is increasingly outliving its utility in the post-state monopoly capitalism period, the nation-state in the Third World is under great threat from the opposite pulls of a traditional reaction. Benefiting from the crisis of nation-state or a strategic nexus between the clergy and barracks, such as in Pakistan, fundamentalism exploited this nexus to its

advantage while pursuing its pan Islamist agenda that undermines the nation-state. However, in both historical and religious terms, Islamic fundamentalism is not capable of providing an alternative to the ethnically divided, economically crisis-ridden and dependent societies. Existence of numerous sects in Islam and internecine sectarian conflict, coupled with the ethnic divisions, pre-empt an ideological consensus and unity both among the clergy and the people. Consequently, the religious extremism, jihadis as its latest anarchistic expression, undermines Muslim societies, on the one hand, and reinforces western hegemony by their adventurist outbursts, such as the attacks on World Trade Centre and Pentagon.

Even the Shiite fundamentalism in Iran, an oil-rich country, has failed not only in providing a dynamic economic system but also in continuing with the aggressive and isolationist foreign policy. The state fundamentalism under General Zia, has had resulted in the atomisation of civil society on sectarian and ethnic lines. A fundamentalist clergy, splintered by sectarian cleavages, could have only helped the growth of fanatic sectarianism in Pakistan. Since authoritarianism in Pakistan has mostly relied on clergy, and the democratic opposition except PNA has always been secular, the fundamentalist parties failed to increase their mass support.

The religious extremists primarily threaten the ongoing processes of transition towards modernisation and democratisation in Muslim society, rather than the West. However, the West and the US have to compensate for the backing of their allies of yesteryear, the fundamentalists, by strengthening the democratic and modernisation processes in the East. This is not simply a matter of morality, but to ensure the strategic interests of the West itself vis-a-vis the Muslim world that cannot be served by prolonged bombing of the Muslim areas. On the other hand, the indigenous democratic movements in the Muslim societies faced with the challenge of obscurantism and authoritarianism can only find their objective ally in the Western democracies. But the West must compensate for the injustice done to the Muslim world, if it wants extremism to give way to a modern and democratic world of Islam.

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