**Time to introspect**

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**Fleeting moments**

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The assassination of the most popular Iranian commander Gen Qassem Soleimani by the US has sent shockwaves in Iran.

It has equally angered innumerable Muslims in other countries who admired Iran’s determination to stand up to the American superpower’s expansionist designs in the Muslim world. A red flag hoisted on the main Qum mosque means the blood of the slain general will be avenged.

Muslims’ sentiments are rightly enflamed when they observe the blood of their brethren being spilled in their own lands because of US hegemonic policies and greed for oil, be that Iraq, Libya or Syria.

The saddest part is that large populations of Muslim countries detest US policies but the governments of these countries remain under the superpower’s tutelage only to survive in power. Hence, whenever any country, Iran for instance, confronts US dictates, Muslims in many countries – regardless of their sectarian biases – rise in unison to support that country.

Although China took the right stand and criticised the assassination of the Iranian commander by the US, what’s keeping Russian President Vladimir Putin reticent about the dastardly act that the imperial power has committed? The last time President Putin decisively acted was to defend Tartus, Russia’s naval base in Syria, by sending a flotilla of warships and submarines in 2011. As a result, American proxies planning to destabilise Syria and remove Syrian President Bashar al-Assad backed down.

Both Russia and China have not only been trading with each other in their own currencies but also have carried out military exercises to promote regional cooperation. China has a robust economy; Russia possesses military might. Together, they could formulate policies to ensure peace in the Middle East and stymie US designs in the region. Those who remember the cold-war era would recall how the US would not dare to enforce repressive policies in weaker countries by attacking them, changing their regimes or occupying them, without fear of repercussions by another superpower.

President Trump’s tweets and statements that Soleimani should have been killed years ago showed how lightly he treated the decision to assassinate the Iranian general. As an upshot, Iran has erupted in mourning, and protests have taken place in other Muslim countries as well, earning the US disgust in large swathes of the Muslim world.

But impotent anger against an arrogant superpower is not enough. The problem is that we fail to feel the pain and suffering of our Muslim brethren as long as we don’t suffer from it ourselves. As a result, we are targeted turn by turn and there’s no one to raise any voice. It’s time for introspection.

It’s time for Muslims to analyse why conflagrations erupt in their lands and not in the Western world. Why have death and destruction become their fate? The death count since 2003, when the US invaded Iraq on the pretence of the latter possessing WMDs, stands at about million and half – mainly of defenceless Iraqi men, women and children. Is this not genocide of innocent citizens of an independent country perpetrated by an arrogant superpower? Again, when WMDs were not found, which were never to be found since they never existed, why did the invaders continue to occupy the country for seventeen long years?

Now that the Iraq parliament has asked the US to withdraw its troops from Iraqi soil, President Trump, in return, has demanded that Iraq pay for the airbases that the superpower established there. What about the high-quality Iraqi oil that the American companies have plundered since the occupation?

However, the superpower’s adventurism in the Middle East needs to be checked, especially when large populations there view the situation with immense trepidation. Which world powers are more suitable to fill the vacuum other than China and Russia together? Both have their geopolitical and commercial interests in the Middle East.

And our national interest is more in consonance with China than with any other country, particularly in view of the monumental economic development the CPEC promises in the future. It’s time to look East. Aren’t we sick of being pushed to ‘do more’?

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