

Bush doctrine of democracy

BY TAYYAB SIDDIQUI

It is the policy of United States to seek and support the growth of democratic movements and institutions in every nation and culture. Spreading freedom's blessings is the calling of our times and when freedom and democracy take root in the Middle East, America and the world will be safer and more peaceful"; is how President Bush articulated his vision of the future in his Inaugural Address. These stirring words, however, have created a sense of dismay and fear in the Arab capitals viewed in the context of US policies pursued during last four years.

The contention that the democratisation in the Middle East is a part of multi-dimensional approach to combat terrorism does not evoke a responsive chord in the Arab hearts. It is seen as a destabilising move. These conflicting interpretations illustrate the gulf that exists between the US and the Muslim world.

The world wide Islamic resurgence and hostility towards Washington is the direct result of the US policies pursued during the last four years that demonized Islam and subjected Muslim countries to aggression and pressure. From invasion of Afghanistan to occupation of Iraq, and now threats and ultimatums to Syria and Iran reinforce the belief that US policies are fixated against Muslim countries.

Willful distortion of Muslim history and beliefs and vilification of Muslim traditions and culture and images of Guantanamo Bay, Abu Ghuraib and Fallujah, could not but confirm their worst fears of US's real intentions.

The neo-cons who dominate the policy making organs in Washington view Islam as a threat to the US and synonymous with terror. The origin of violence, in their view, is Islamic fundamentalism, backward societies and tyrannical regimes, and hence the need to reform the Muslim societies. The neo-cons describe the Islamic militants as the 'forces of darkness' and as 'ultimate evil' and hence not a worthy interlocutor for dialogue.

This doctrine is ominously reminiscent of the 'white men's burden'

most analysts agree, proved counterproductive. In the short term, it may have succeeded, but it has also generated radical and militant sentiments all across the Muslim world, looking for an opportunity to strike back. The arrogance of power has misled US in the conviction that political developments and elections in Iraq and Afghanistan following military action are vindication of its policies and recipe for other countries in the region.

Washington can win the war against terror only if it were to identify the root cause of despair and frustration, which the extremists exploit. It is unfortunate that hawks in the US policy making echelon continue to hold "ignorance, misperceptions, misguided Muslim intellectuals and inflammatory Arab media" responsible for the widening gulf between the US and the Muslim World.

The influence of Zionists is all pervading in Washington and is responsible for such diagnosis and prescriptions, masking the real intention of improving Israel's strategic position in the region. It is tragic that the US has failed to comprehend that the terrorist attacks were directly related to, or reaction to its policies such as unqualified support to Israel's brutality and cruel persecution of the hapless Palestinians. No effort to rebuild trust between America and the Muslim world would have any measure of success unless the Palestine issue is resolved and the ruthless repression of Palestinians in the occupied territories halted.

Washington's silence indeed abetment in Sharon's policy of demolition of houses, collective punishment, expropriation of Palestinian lands, target killings of their leaders and destruction of civil society infrastructure are fuelling hatred and anger expressed in suicide attacks and unending violent acts.

It is frightening how the only superpower of the world could be so insensitive and unimaginative to hope that bridges can be built between US and the Arab world in the face of endless humiliations and tribulations that Palestinians suffer every day.

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policy of reforming eighteenth century Africa. The relentless persecution of anti Muslim policies and measures, ranging from indiscriminate killings of Iraqis to financial squeeze in the form of black listing the Muslim charities on the pretext that these were conduit for the flow of funds to the terrorist, have filled Muslim hearts with a sense of foreboding and extreme resentment.

This anti-Islam hysteria seems to have gripped the West also. The Muslim immigrants living in Europe for decades have become the target of hatred and ostracization, almost apartheid. The German daily "Sueddeutsche Zeitung" perceptively portrayed this paranoia—"every head scarf is a political emblem, every Muslim an extremist and every mosque a seething hotbed of hatred." Muslim minorities in Europe and US have become favourite target of ridicule, not worthy of any right or consideration. The fear of Islam has thus drawn an enduring divide between US and the Muslim world.

In this backdrop Bush's prescription of democratic reforms in the Arab world could only inspire more alienation and apprehension among Muslim masses. The policy is totally unrealistic and unrelated to the objective of "ending tyranny in the world". Change in the Arab world cannot be imposed. It has to come from within if it is to succeed.

History suggests that when old structure of the government and society is threatened, the radical and violent ideologies exercise most appeal. Unfortunately, the neo-cons, in their zeal for war against terror, have become oblivious of the historical process and insist on the march of freedom, ignoring the ground realities. Such a policy will only help the radicals move from the fringe to the centre of political activity.

The Islamic parties in the region, presently marginalized will gain strength in the elections and an Algeria like situation may be repeated when the popular will was thwarted and the country plunged into anarchy and decade long civil war. Any attempt to impose a change, accelerate or control the process, or choose the participants in the process as done in elections in Afghanistan and Iraq will only invite a backlash and frustrate the policy.

The US war against terror has,

A World Bank report reveals that as a result of Israeli policies, the Palestinians have been impoverished to the point that today 47 percent of Palestinians in the occupied territories are living below the poverty line. Their average income has dropped by more than one third and quarter of the work force is unemployed.

The number of Palestinians working in Israel once 120,000 is now reduced to only 1000 due to cross border restrictions and closure of Gaza and West Bank. There are 7,000 Palestinian prisoners in Israeli prisons. Israel maintains two army divisions consisting of 7 brigades, permanently stationed in the occupied territories, besides police and border guards.

The construction of 25 feet high concrete wall separating Palestinians and Israelis in the West Bank has added to their woes. Ten percent of West Bank's most fertile agricultural land has been grabbed. The number of Jewish settlers has increased to 200,000 in 2004 as against 6,000 in 1977. The US guarantee of Israeli bonds amounting to US\$ 9 billion spent on their construction makes the US an accessory to the crime. Bush's roadmap for a Palestinian state remains on the drawing board. His commitment to help create a Palestinian State in 2005 has been forgotten.

It is tragic that the US administration instead of responding to the situation and restraining Sharon in his barbaric policies believes that lack of democratic and institutional reforms in the Palestinian Authority has held back the progress in the peace process. The political discourse on the issue is one sided. Washington continues to disregard the fact that Arab Israel conflict is at the root of terrorism. It persists in its belief that decades of repression, lack of democracy and of political and social modernisation are the real causes and hence its advocacy for liberty and democracy in the Arab world.

Bush's doctrine for democracy, his "greatest opportunity and immediate goal" is bound to flounder, as it does not take into account the fundamental factors outlined above. His drive for democracy would only create more instability in the Arab world, or is that the real game plan as conspiracy theorists would assert?

The writer is a former Ambassador