

Unpopularity of US policies

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IN the light of the current situation in Iraq and Palestine in particular, and in the Muslim world in general, little surprise was shown at the results of an opinion poll conducted recently by organs of US print and electronic media in a number of Arab/Islamic states, excluding Pakistan.

The results showed a high increase in the unpopularity ratings of US policies. While this was not unexpected, what was surprising, and in fact disturbing, was the expressed preference in the poll in respect of world leaders, placing Osama bin Laden and Saddam Hussein in the top bracket.

It may be assumed that the poll preference does not reflect the major segment of public opinion in the Islamic world. Even as a minority strand, however, it is disturbing and needs to be noted by Islamic societies for corrective action involving the need for inculcating greater sensitivity, tolerance and balance in the thought processes of its citizens.

The results of the poll, even if limited in scope are disturbing for the state of mind they reflect and spell out the dangers of self-destructive policies being repeated in future.

Never in recent history has an act of violence, perpetrated by a militant Muslim group had such disastrous consequences for the Islamic world as 9/11 did.

If September 11 had been a case of run-of-the mill terrorism, it could have been explained as an act of bitter and frustrated revenge, without due thought given to the consequences. But to the perpetrators of the attack, with its meticulous, long-term planning, technological expertise and sophisticated operation, the intensity of the backlash by the strongest military power in history and the likely fallout on global Islamic interests should have been more than evident.

Apart from humanitarian reasons for which 9/11 is to be condemned, the chain of events set in motion was much less likely to serve any Islamic interests than to provoke the sort of catastrophic backlash against the Islamic world that it did.

With the end of the cold war and the collapse of the Soviet Union, the US had been suffering from a "rent an enemy psychosis", to sustain the rationale for its gigantic military establishment and its unchallenged military power, essential for the realization of its strategic aims

under unremitting pressure.

Freedom movements such as those in Kashmir and Palestine have been dealt crushing blows by the post 9/11 Western identification of liberation struggles of Muslim peoples as terrorism.

This has enabled India and Israel to establish an ostensible commonality of interests with the US in the fight against Islamic militancy and titled the balance heavily against the Palestinian and Kashmiri resistance.

Resistance movements, including Hezbollah which single-handedly drove out the Israelis from South Lebanon, Hamas and others have been classified as terrorist organizations and are being treated as such, in the aftermath of 9/11. The environment for Muslim communities in the West (and even elsewhere) has sharply deteriorated. Opportunities have plummeted in respect of livelihood, education, security and dignity.

The Muslim diaspora lives under a cloud of harassment, uncertainty and even persecution. In a number of Islamic states including Pakistan, the Al Qaeda is playing a highly disruptive, terrorist role, impeding stability, peace, development and investment; fomenting extremism, hatred and violence and blocking the path of progress for Islamic societies. The assassination attempt on prime minister — designate Shaukat Aziz, for which responsibility has been claimed by Al Qaeda, is the latest in the long list of terrorist outrages in Pakistan and other Islamic countries.

Next to Osama bin Laden it was Saddam Hussein who received top ratings in the poll in a number of Arab/Islamic states. While it is clear that he bore little responsibility for the war imposed on Iraq a year ago by the Bush administration, Saddam Hussein was directly responsible for the war over Kuwait's occupation, which entrenched the US massively in the Gulf; imposed a Western protectorate on Iraq and gave the US a decisive say in the region's affairs.

On August 1, the eve of the invasion of Kuwait, Iraq was a strong state with a prosperous people. It had, in Gulf terms, a developed industrial base, the fourth largest oil production in the world, a high standard of living by regional standards and the largest military force in the Gulf. By February 27, 1991, (the end of the Gulf war), the Iraqi infrastructure had been smashed, its armed forces decimated and its prosperous society in shambles. The bitter winter of the Iraqi tragedy had begun.

The argument over Saddam's

power, essential for the realization of its strategic aims.

The clash of civilizations concept and the perception of Islamic militancy as the main emerging threat in the post-cold war world had already created a psychological climate for the assertion of United States power on a wider scale. The September 11 attack provided for the United States a heaven-sent opportunity and a great launching pad for its post-cold war, global designs.

The immediate price was paid and is still being paid by Afghanistan. Osama bin Laden showed a shocking disregard for the interests of the Afghan people by using their country as a sanctuary and a base for his attacks against the world's sole superpower.

On their part, the Taliban rulers criminally sacrificed the interests of their land and of the Afghan people under the suicidal influence of a handful of non-Afghan Al Qaeda zealots, tilting at the windmills of western hegemony.

A state like Afghanistan which had never been colonized or occupied by a foreign power, even when most Third World nations were under foreign domination, has perforce to live with the indefinite occupation of United States military power which has also established bases in neighbouring Central Asia.

But for the intense climate of insecurity and hostility against the Arab/Islamic world created by 9/11, there was no way that the Bush administration could have rallied American public opinion to a unilateral, pre-emptive attack on Iraq with the tragic consequences which have followed for the Iraqi people. A number of other Islamic states are wary of their place in the US hit list, with Iraq and Syria

begun.

The argument over Saddam's responsibility for the war over Kuwait is meaningless. For notwithstanding US/Israeli designs of neutralizing Iraq's military strength and controlling its oil resources, their designs could not have been achieved (in the period before 9/11) without the Iraqi president's suicidal folly. For it was crystal clear that the US, with its very significant energy and geo-political interests in the Gulf, would not accept the occupation of Kuwait or any other GCC state.

It was equally clear that if it came to a war, there could be only one result and that, contrary to the expectations, in certain quarters, there was no realistic prospect of popular uprisings in regional states in support of Saddam. As for the question of the US having set a trap over Kuwait, Saddam had full six months (the period given by the US) to extricate himself from the presumed trap, which he failed to do in spite of the urgings of Iraq well wishers.

It is the failure to sense the interests and capabilities, the fears and concerns, the priorities and values of the other party concerned in a given situation that has led to historic miscalculations at the crucial crossroads of world history.

Such significant misjudgments stem from failure to anticipate the response of the other party involved in a developing situation. Peoples and states responsible for such miscalculations pay a high price, for unlike domestic situations, it is much more difficult in foreign affairs to turn the clock back, since events impinging on other states acquire a momentum of their own, rarely susceptible to reversal or backpedalling.