

## **Muslim world in crisis**

I remember in the 1980s as he orated against the Soviet Union, President Reagan often quoted from Thomas Paine's Common Sense with his vision of a United States strong enough "to begin the world over again." One of his Republican successors did it. President George W Bush did begin the world all over again. But he turned it upside down. No wonder, we are today living in a turbulent world.

The ideological division of the Cold War world into two rival blocs, the East and the West, has given way to a new configuration of power in the form of unipolarity, unleashing its own security challenges and problems for the world at large. The world now stands divided between the "West and the Rest" and, as before, between two unequal halves, one embarrassingly rich and the other desperately poor. While the West is endowed with abundance of wealth and affluence, the "Rest," which includes mostly Third World countries representing the overwhelming part of humanity, languishes in poverty and backwardness.

Unfortunately, all is not well with the Third World. Most developing countries suffer serious governance and rule of law problems rooted in their authoritarian and non-representative political culture. Some of them are mired in perpetual intra-state or inter-state conflicts. What is even more disturbing is that two of the world's largest regions, Africa and South Asia, both rich in natural and human resources, are the biggest victims of poverty and violence. Both continue to be scenes of endemic instability as a result of conflicts and hostilities, unresolved disputes, unaddressed historical grievances, and deep-rooted communal and religious estrangement.

And the Muslim world is in no better shape. It represents the tragic story of Medusa, the ill-piloted French naval ship in the 19th century that ran aground because of its incompetent captain's blunders and his dependence on others for navigational guidance, leaving behind a sordid tale of helplessness, death and desperation. The Medusa's wreck is still out there, stuck on the West African coast. Like Medusa's wreck, the Muslim world is just lying there, aimlessly floating like a stricken ship with no one to steer it out of the troubled waters.

The Muslim world today is indeed in a crisis. Representing one-fifth of humanity as well as of the global land mass spreading over 57 countries and possessing 70 percent of the world's energy resources and nearly 50 percent of the world's natural resources, the Muslim world should have been a global giant, economically as well as politically. Rich in everything but weak in all respects, it represents only five percent of the world's GDP and is totally a non-consequential entity with no role in global decision-making, or even in addressing its own problems.

Though some of them are sitting on the world's largest oil and gas reserves, the majority of Muslim countries are among the poorest and most backward in the world. Poor and dispossessed, Muslim nations emerging from long colonial rule may have become sovereign states but are without genuine political and economic independence. With rare exceptions, they are all at the mercy of the West for their political strength and survival and are politically bankrupt with no



institutions other than authoritarian rule. They have no established tradition of systemic governance or institutional approach in their policies and priorities.

They have no bone, no muscle and whatever wealth they possess is being exploited by the West. The rulers in today's Muslim world, without exception, are at the mercy of the US for their political strength and survival, and are responsible for the current political, economic and military subservience of their countries to the West. Their lands and resources remain under "protective" military control of their masters, who are also the direct beneficiaries of their oil proceeds and investments.

Every ingredient of political life in these so-called sovereign states has been faked; sovereignty is not sovereignty, parliament is not parliament, law is not law, and the opposition parties are as corrupt and wasted as the ruling parties. Even the independence following the colonial powers' handing over of the reins of government to local rulers was not true independence. Other than being members of the United Nations, they have no semblance of sovereignty, independence or freedom.

Peace is the essence of Islam and yet the Muslim nations have seen very little of it, especially after the Second World War. Conflict and violence are pervasive in the Muslim world. Some states are home to foreign military bases, while others have allowed foreign forces to use their territory freely and even to carry out their "operations" at will. There are others selflessly engaged in proxy wars on behalf of others and in some cases against their own people. The tragedies in Palestine, Kashmir, Iraq and Afghanistan represent the continuing helplessness of the world's Muslims.

Since 9/11, Islam itself is being demonised by its detractors with obsessive focus on the religion of individuals and groups accused of complicity or involvement in terrorist activities. Islam is being blamed for everything that goes wrong in any part of the world. The Muslim freedom struggles of yesterday are now seen as the primary source of "militancy and terrorism."

Global terrorism is now being used to justify military occupations and to curb the legitimate freedom struggles of Muslim peoples. Muslim issues remain unaddressed for decades. Palestine is tired and has given up. Iraq is still burning. Afghanistan has yet to breathe in peace. Kashmir is devastated and stands disillusioned. Lebanon is simmering. Pakistan is suffering the worst leadership crisis. Iran is on notice. The Muslim world could not be more chaotic and more helpless. Surely these are critical times for the Muslim world.

What aggravates this dismal scenario is the inability of the Muslim world as a bloc to take care of its problems or to overcome its weaknesses. Its rulers have mortgaged to the West not only the security and sovereignty of their countries but also the political and economic futures of their nations. Despite material affluence in a few oil-rich countries, there is a widespread sense of political and economic deprivation in the Muslim world.

These are all a dreary phenomena for which the rulers of the Muslim world alone are responsible. Thanks to our obscurantist mindset, we have done nothing to secure our future in this alarmingly chaotic world. It makes no sense dwelling nostalgically on Islam's past and



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“lost” glory. For us, the steady erosion of Islamic polity and power, the Muslim world’s lurch into Western colonialism, and now, total political, economic, social and technological backwardness, should be stark reminders of the historical magnitude of the failures of Muslim leadership. We cannot entirely blame the West for the Muslim world’s institutional bankruptcy, its political and intellectual aridity, its deficiency in knowledge, education and science and technology, its aversion to modernity and modernisation, and its growing servility to the West.

Things will not change unless the Muslim world itself fixes its fundamentals and puts its house in order. Angels will not descend to help or salvage it. It must take control of its own destiny through unity, mutuality and cohesion within its ranks. Its wealth and resources now being exploited by the West should be used to build its own strength and for its own socio-economic well-being. The key to reshaping the destiny of the Muslim world lies in its political and economic independence and military strength with each Muslim nation opting for peace and democracy, and for knowledge and technology as top priority.

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