



Global Trends: Adversity or opportunity?

DHAKA WEDNESDAY FEBRUARY 25, 2009



Political use of religion

Its many faces

SERAJUL ISLAM CHOWDHURY

OLITICS is always about power, and the ways to power are many and various. And of these the use of religion is both time-honoured and effective. Religion, when used in politics, does not remain spiritual. It becomes materialistic in its manifestations as well as intent. Its faces, however, have changed with time and circumstances.

Kings have used religion to invest themselves with divine rights and authority. Even in modern times the King of Nepal, for example, went on claiming to be a living incarnation of God, until he was overthrown. Emperors have found it to their advantage to rouse religious fervour among their soldiers while invading and conquering foreign territories. Religious wars were not unknown in the past, and even George W Bush, the down-right imperialist as he was, called the international community to join him in a crusade against the so-called Islamist terrorists. His might have been a slip of the tongue as he later claimed it to be, but crusades were quite familiar in the middle ages, designed purportedly to recover the Holy land, particularly Jerusalem, from the Muslims. The real intention behind such adventures, nevertheless, had been as transparent as that of George Bush -- it being the desire for plunder, territorial expansion and trade.

The medieval domains of the Roman Catholic Church had assumed the character of the Holy Roman Empire. And Protestantism, which began as a movement of religious reform, was also a protest against the 'imperialism' of Catholicism and was not unconnected with emergence of nationalism in Europe, which it did not fail to promote. The Puritans in England had fought against royal authority and gone to the extent of beheading a ruling monarch. Puritanism, we all know, had, at the same time, contributed to the rise of both individualism and capitalism, which were, of course, interlinked both historically and operationally. The French Revolution was very clearly a political uprising, but one of its marked objectives was to bring down the power and authority of the Church.

Colonialism was a brutally economic phenomenon, having nothing spiritual in it; and yet it too had found it convenient to make use of religion in its functioning. Although the most potent instrument in the hands of the coloniser was the gun, the use of religion helped him to deepen the roots of colonial occupation. The conquest of the heart followed that of the land.

Colonialism had been a matter of very bitter experience for us in the Indian subcontinent. It would, perhaps, be worthwhile to recall the collaboration between politics and reli-

gion that had occurred here. Initially, there were the Christian missionaries who had volunteered to bring the uninitiated on to the light of Christianity, hoping, even if without formal declaration, to help the process of colonisation. But the men of the East India company who were bent upon colonising the whole of subcontinent had realised that trade was more efficacious than the gun and religion. Through experience they had gathered the knowledge that proselytisation might even be counterproductive. Nevertheless, the use of religion for political purposes continued to be operative in two contrary ways. The colonisers used it to separate the two communities -- the Hindus and the Muslims and the colonised themselves used it as a source of inspiration in their struggle and drive the colonizers away.

The 1857 uprising of the sepoy was an ominous phenomenon for the English rulers. The spark that ultimately set the resentment of the Indian soldiers ablaze was the knowledge that the new brand of cartridges they were given to use contained 'un-holy' grease obtained from cows and pigs. Ironically, it brought the Hindu and the Muslim soldiers together as never before. Later, almost in a vengeful manner, the English rulers managed to set the middle classes of the two communities against one another in a political manner which proved to

be irreconcilable. The nationalist leaders of the two communities began to identify themselves as Hindus and Muslims, and the anti-imperialist struggle degenerated into communalism, helping the rulers to divide the country, ultimately. The partition of the subcontinent, which caused unprecedented bloodshed and migration of people, owes largely to the political use of religion.

The rulers of Pakistan decided to call their state Islamic. The intention was to divert the attention of the people from worldly problems to other-worldly issues and also to rouse feelings against India, which in their perception was a Hindu state. The Pakistani rulers wanted to keep East Bengal as their colony, and when East Bengal stood up demanding independence their soldiers perpetrated a genocide on the Bengalis on a scale seldom recorded in history. This, of course, was done in the name of saving Islam.

India, on the other hand, had sworn itself to be a secular state. But even in secular India religious communalism persists. The bourgeois does not always find it easy to disenfranchise himself of his religious inheritance. Moreover, there are political organisations like the Bharatiya Janata Party who thrive on the political use of religion. The BJP has its compeer in Bangladesh which calls itself the Jamaat-e-Islami.

That the Jamaat-e-Islami who were war criminals and collaborators in the 1971 War of Liberation, should be allowed to function and flourish in Bangladesh which established itself discarding the religion-based two-nation theory is, apparently, a matter of surprise. But it is not difficult to explain why this should have happened. The new rulers of Bangladesh were reluctant to be fully secular because of their past affiliation to the Pakistan movement. When Ziaur Rahman came to power in 1975 he and his colleagues felt disinclined to call themselves Bengalis, and set up a new brand of nationalism called Bangladeshi nationalism.

The reasons were two; first their own training in the Pakistani army and, secondly, pressure from the capitalist world and the Middle Eastern Muslim states, who had coalesced, as they usually do, in their antipathy towards secularism, considering it to be perilously close to communism. Zia's 'revolution' has also to its credit the removal of secularism and socialism from the basic principles laid down in the original constitution of Bangladesh. All these are, or course, of a piece and remind us of the new political line his government had made up its mind to follow. The usurping and notoriously corrupt ruler, General Ershad,

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Liberalism-where is it today?

Case of Indonesia and Egypt

NASIM FIRDAUS

SEPTEMBER 11, 2001 was a day this generation is unlikely to forget. No one could have ever imagined how deeply that one event called 9/11 could have cut through the hearts and minds of people around the world and how it could have changed the world as we knew it. Perhaps not even the architects and engineers who managed the deed from far away. This series of attacks on the United States left the world with deep cuts from which it continues to bleed to this day; wounds that can be healed to stop the bleeding, leaving behind deep scars that will remain for ever.

Ever since, there has been a search for the reason of this atrocious attack. The questions of why, who and how have not been answered fully to this day. Volumes have been written and a great deal of soul searching has been done to see if the attacks could have been prevented and or avoided, and, if the course of world history can be changed now. This painful beginning for the new millennium was both stunning and mind boggling. Notwithstanding what the planners of the attack had in mind, it began to move the vehicle of peace in reverse gear, the direction of a path to peace that was envisioned with the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the fall of the Berlin Wall. The theory of Francis Fukuyama on the End of History was relegated to the back seat while Samuel Huntington's Clash of Civilisations took over the front row. World order was, once again, in a flux resulting in a widespread shifting and sifting of

While liberalism for a period of time seemed overwhelmed by its own liberties and appeared to be on the wane, people's power reestablished it at the center. This was amply demonstrated by the elections in Indonesia following the Bali bombings that the country witnessed with dismay. Change is now sweeping across different parts of the world as witnessed by the defeat of radicals, extremists and the neocons at the ballots in Pakistan, the US and Bangladesh. A new wave of pluralistic liberalism, balancing liberties and personal freedoms in a democracy with duties and obligations towards the society and the world at large, has hopefully been ushered in. Respect for all ideologies and religions must become the cornerstone of liberalism and democracy for the future. Liberalism in the extreme must be abandoned for liberalism on the middle path. It must, however, be kept under a watchful eye - the pendulum must continue to swing ever so gently, without getting stuck at either end for too long.

global priorities. Security, at the cost of curtailing individual liberties, became the key word and liberalism identified as in personal freedoms of the 1960s through the nineties was quickly confined to the trash can of history.

This doctrinal shift was in the coming, unfortunately for a long time. Deprivation leading to political disenfranchisement coupled with endemic poverty in wide swathes of the world, could not have led to anything but polarisation of the philosophies in the two worlds between those who had everything and those who had nothing.

Even before the occurrence of 9/11 a trend for radicalism, extremism and neo-conservatism moving in to occupy the space left behind by liberalism that had moved far to the left could be seen. A relatively quiet social revolution against hunger, poverty and inequity was converting itself into radicalism, extremism and terrorism with remarkable haste. Social injustices were being righted by many wrongs. Extremism was being propagated by everyone from Islamic to Christian to Hindu to even Buddhist fundamentalists all in the name of seeking justice until it was

flourishing to different degrees, in different regions by the beginning of the 21st century. "Charities" began coming into the life of the ordinary people along with religious scriptures. In the name of freedom of religion and speech that was earlier guaranteed by liberal democracies emboldened by liberal ideas, fatwas and edicts began to issue at random for perceived crimes against religion. Even the United States saw a resurgence of neo conservatism as George W. Bush took over the presidency in 2001. In the Middle East, the Oslo peace process was virtually

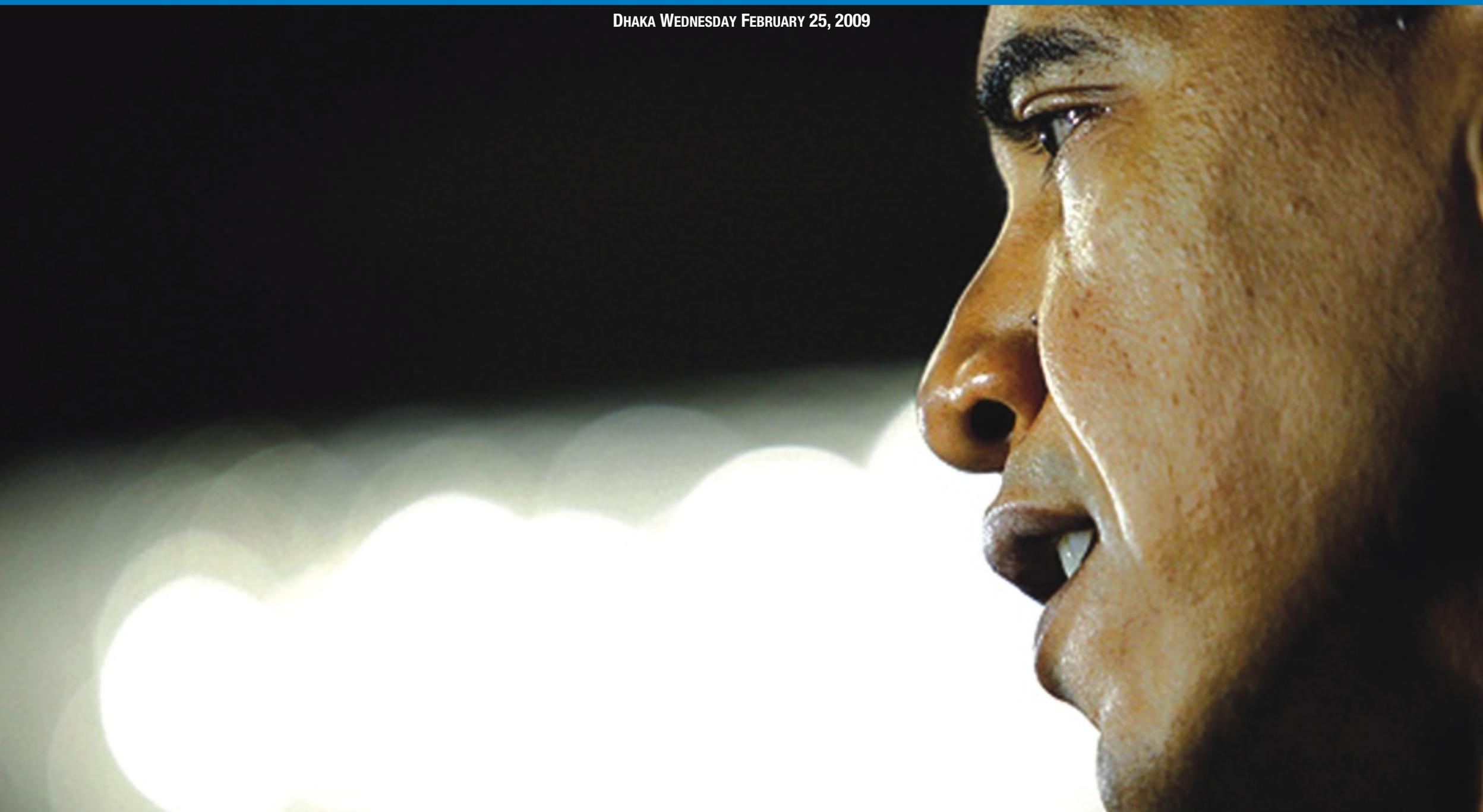
dead and the second intifada was on the rise. Soon thereafter Yasser Arafat was dead and Hamas won the right to govern through people's power.

At around the same time Indonesia saw a change of destiny for the Islamist parties. For nearly fifty years Indonesia had, under its autocratic rulers, suppressed religious liberties to the extreme. After the fall of Suharto's iron fisted rule, Islamist parties began dotting the political radar screen of Indonesia. The dispossessed found a voice with the re-emergence of "liberal democracy". Pesantren educated Abdurrahman Wahid leading one of the largest Islamist party with forty million supporters became the first "democratically" elected president of the country. However, when it was time to elect a new government Indonesians, without a second thought, voted overwhelmingly for non-Islamist secular nationalist parties to power ensuring the continuation of pluralism and secularism in the country. Nevertheless, with the emergence of at least a dozen Islamist parties in the political scene there was a sea change in the way Indonesia looked at itself. Women were seen converting to the "fundamentals of Islam" by donning the *hijab* and wearing "Muslim" attires. Democracy, brought in by people's power through the uprising of 1998, ensured "religious freedom" for all.

The same trend was also noticeable in Egypt following Anwar Sadat's assassination by suspected Muslim Brotherhood assailants. The *hijab* flourished and the short skirts and women wearing European dresses became invisible. With liberalism

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America-Islam relations

MUNIR QUDDUS

In a recent interview, President Obama said that the results of the US elections present the United States with an opportunity to reboot its strained relations with the Islamic world. During his inaugural address on January 20, the 44th president of the United States pleasantly surprised many American Muslims by his statement: "To the Muslim world, we seek a new way forward, based on mutual interest and mutual respect." The new president has expressed his intention to give a major speech in a Muslim capital to share his vision. Symbolic steps do matter in improving relations between people and nations. However, real change can only come from substantive shifts in policy in order to reboot this critical but long-neglected relationship.

During the campaign, Mr. Obama expressed a desire to put greater emphasis on diplomacy as an instrument of foreign policy, use force only as a last resort, work to achieve lasting

The average Muslim has come to believe that the war on terror is in fact a war on Islam. Headlines with stories of killings of innocent civilians in Iraq and Afghanistan, ghastly mistreatment of prisoners in Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay prison, documented violations of civil rights of Muslim immigrants, attacks on institutions like Islamic charities, and demonising Islam's prophet and holy book further inflamed the sentiments against the United States.

peace in the Middle-East, adopt a more compassionate domestic agenda, greater respect for civil rights for all citizens and immigrants, close Guantanamo Bay prison, end torture, eliminate racial and ethnic profiling, adopt a humane and effective immigration policy.

On his first day in the office, by signing executive orders to close the Guantanamo Bay prison and effectively ending torture, he has already taken giant steps in fulfilling his com-

mitments to the rule of law. If he is able to deliver on even a few of other promises, Mr. Obama would have made huge progress in rebuilding the fractured relations with the Muslim people.

The Pew Research surveys have shown that the image of the United States in the Muslim world, even in countries considered close allies like Turkey, have greatly suffered in recent years. Nor surprisingly, the Pew Research surveys of Americans show

that the American public also have come to develop a deep mistrust of Islam and Muslims.

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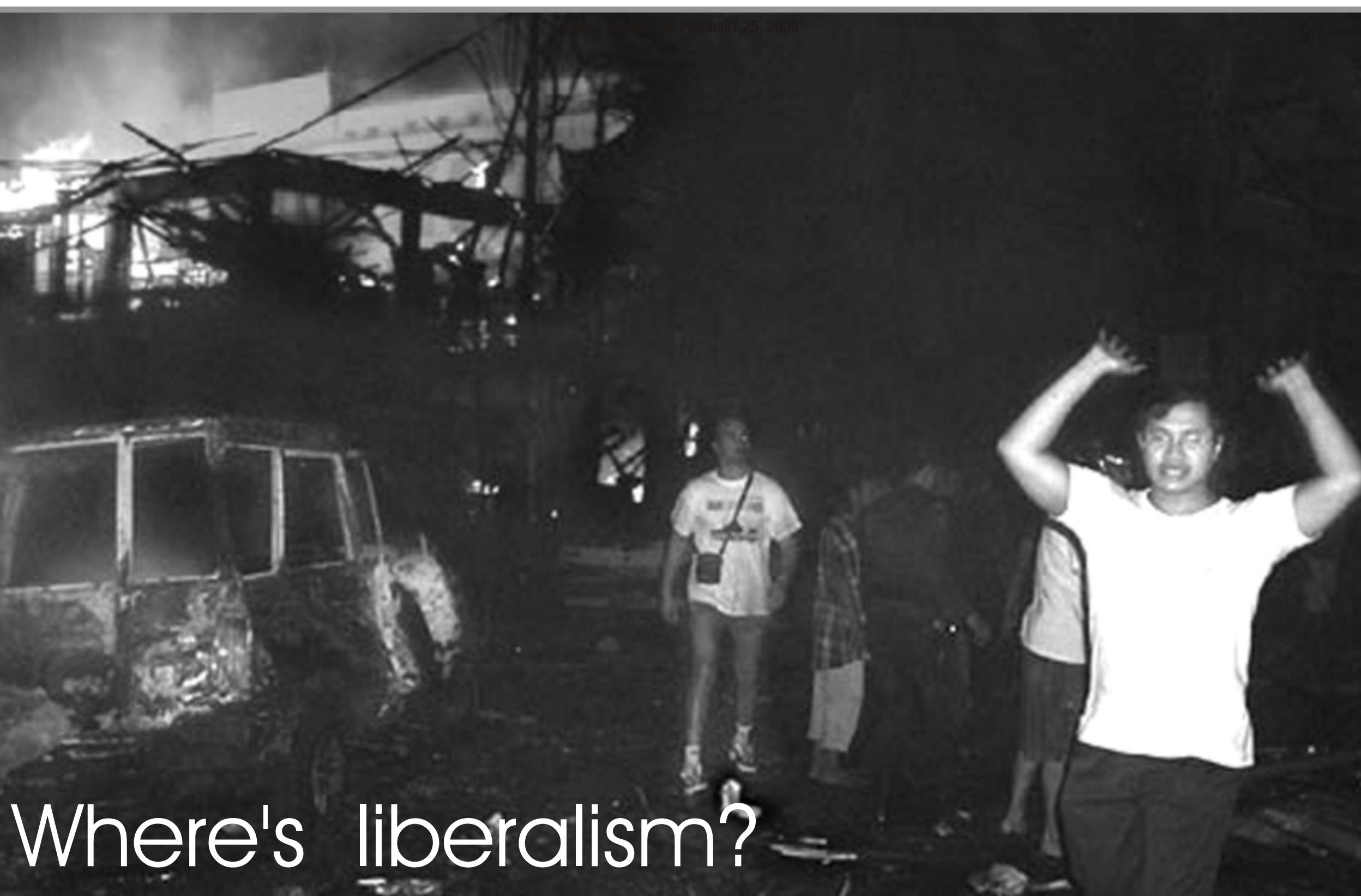
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At home a stubbornly high percentage of Americans continue to believe that Saddam Hussein had a role in the September 11 attacks, that Al Qaeda has wide support in the Islamic world, and that the Islamic scriptures teach violence and worldwide domination.

This situation must change since how the world's Muslim community perceives the American government has direct bearing on the long-term security of the United States. Fortunately, even though the relations have been in a deep freeze for most of the past eight years, a few strategic moves taken in a timely manner have potential to thaw these relationships. It is critical that the United States and the global Muslim community develop a partnership based on mutual respect. How can America regain its lost stature as the moral leader of the free world among the billion plus Muslim citizens of the globe?

It will take time to regain the trust

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Where's liberalism?

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moving to the extreme left where laissez faire often reigned the day, liberation of religion took centre stage. Liberal societies began to change their way of life in order to adjust to the renewed call to follow the scripture and return to, once again, the fundamentals of their religion. This however, did not daunt the spirit

to value their freedom to be educated and to participate in governance, while the women of Indonesia and Egypt continue to enjoy and assert their liberties from under the *hijab*.

In Indonesia, the pesantrens, guided carefully by moderate and liberal leadership, continue to be a force to reckon with. It was once famously said "pesantrens do not

than most secular countries around the world. It is a country where Muslims carry Hindu names and Christians carry Muslim names.

While men with caps and long alkellahs are sometimes visible in Indonesia it is a rare sight in Egypt. Egypt keeps a tight hold on religious freedoms and President

the defeat of radicals, extremists and the neocons at the ballots in Pakistan, the US and Bangladesh. A new wave of pluralistic liberalism, balancing liberties and personal freedoms in a democracy with duties and obligations towards the society and the world at large, has hopefully been ushered in. Respect for all ideologies and religions must become the cornerstone of liberalism and democracy for the future. Liberalism in the extreme must be abandoned for liberalism on the middle path. It must, however, be kept under a watchful eye - the pendulum must continue to swing ever so gently, without getting stuck at either end for too long.

Nasim Firdaus is former Ambassador.

While liberalism for a period of time seemed overwhelmed by its own liberties and appeared to be on the wane, people's power reestablished it at the centre. This was amply demonstrated by the elections in Indonesia following the Bali bombings that the country witnessed with dismay. Change is now sweeping across different parts of the world as witnessed by the defeat of radicals, extremists and the neocons at the ballots in Pakistan, the US and Bangladesh. A new wave of pluralistic liberalism, balancing liberties and personal freedoms in a democracy with duties and obligations towards the society and the world at large, has hopefully been ushered in. Respect for all ideologies and religions must become the cornerstone of liberalism and democracy for the future. Liberalism in the extreme must be abandoned for liberalism on the middle path. It must, however, be kept under a watchful eye - the pendulum must continue to swing ever so gently, without getting stuck at either end for too long.

of true liberalism. Women being confined within the four walls in Afghanistan, or women wrapping themselves head-to-toe in black chadors in Iran or Baluchistan, or hijab-clad women becoming the norm in Indonesia and Egypt, have not really caused liberalism to collapse in any of these countries. If anything, many of these practices have actually strengthened the respect for personal freedoms. Women in Iran have demonstrated on the streets and in the polling booths to get back many of the freedoms that were curtailed by the revolutionary government of the late-seventies. Women of Afghanistan have learned

produce radicalism, much less terrorism, because they are the heart of religious study that teaches the way of life, morality and ethics". The pesantrens that dot the archipelago are indeed the backbone of religious tolerance and respect that Indonesians enjoy to this day. It is a country where religious pluralism one of the pillars of liberalism - means something to every Indonesian. Indonesians carry on with a mixture of Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist traditions and practices in their everyday life without conflict and with respect for each of these religions. It is a country whose population is more secular

Hosni Mubarak continues to rule with an iron fist leaving no space for either religious freedom or extremism to raise its hydra head from under the sands of the desert. It also keeps a tight control over fatwas, with the Grand Mufti being the only one allowed to issue them. While liberalism for a period of time seemed overwhelmed by its own liberties and appeared to be on the wane, people's power reestablished it at the center. This was amply demonstrated by the elections in Indonesia following the Bali bombings that the country witnessed with dismay. Change is now sweeping across different parts of the world as witnessed by



America-Islam relations



FROM PAGE 8

and correct the negative perceptions on both sides. Mr. Obama's election as the 44th president of the United States itself is the first giant step towards potential reconciliation. His election with strong support of the American Muslims has already healed some of the wounds at home and abroad. The reaction on the Muslim street across the globe is one of pleasant surprise and enhanced expectations that perhaps the Islamic world and US will now have an opportunity to turn the page in their relationship.

A few steps implemented with sincerity by your administration will go a long way in rebuilding this important but badly strained relationship.

The invasion of Iraq was and remains a sore point in much of the Islamic world, and especially on the Arab street. Bringing the war to a closure and pulling out American combat troops in an orderly manner at the earliest schedule will be a giant step in improving the battered image of the US amongst Muslims at home and abroad.

Support the elected government of Afghanistan against Taliban, but do this in a manner that immediately benefits the average Afghan. If the US launches a mini Marshall plan to build schools, hospitals, roads and highways, and institutions of democracy -- this will have an enormous positive impact on Muslims across the world.

In Three Cups of Tea, Greg Mortenson, an American mountaineer who has built many schools in Pakistan and Afghanistan, makes this point with enormous credibility.

Rapidly shut down Guantanamo Bay prison, end torture, extra-judicial incarceration and the policy of sub-contracting out torture or "extraordinary rendition," instituted by the Bush administration. Secretary Gates is the right person to close what many con-

It will take time to regain the trust and correct the negative perceptions on both sides. Mr. Obama's election as the 44th president of the United States itself is the first giant step towards potential reconciliation. His election with strong support of the American Muslims has already healed some of the wounds at home and abroad. The reaction on the Muslim street across the globe is one of pleasant surprise and enhanced expectations that perhaps the Islamic world and US will now have an opportunity to turn the page in their relationship.

sider a shameful chapter in the US war against terror.

In the domestic front, stop overt and covert racial profiling of Arabs, Muslims, and other racial minorities. Since September 11, the assault on the Muslim community in America has been persistent and relentless. For example, in an attempt to shut down channels of funding, many reputable Islamic charities were falsely targeted. This should end.

The new administration will do well to listen to a diverse group of citizens on how to combat terrorism. The new administration should actively recruit Muslims for the FBI, the CIA, the army, and law enforcement agencies.

The new administration should earnestly enlist members of the American Muslim community in the fight against global terror. Global terrorism is the common enemy of America as well as the peace loving Muslims at home and abroad. There are significantly more areas of cooperation and partnerships between the Islamic world and the West than there are conflicts. The idea of a perpetual and inevitable clash of civilisations is somewhat self-fulfilling. Only by joining forces, can the extremist ideology

be defeated.

In the Justice Department there is a special division for Muslim civil rights issue -- actively pursuing hate crimes where Muslims are targeted specifically. Appoint a senior respected Muslim leader to head this division. Similarly, appoint leaders from the Muslim American community as ambassadors and senior diplomats. President Sarkozy has appointed Rachida Dati whose parents emigrated from North Africa as France's justice minister.

The new administration should engage all parties -- friends and foes -- in conversations to further peace. During the campaign, with great courage and in the face of repeated attacks and distortions, he defended the position that the doors of unconditional dialogue should remain open in the cause of peace. The model used to reboot relations with Libya should be used to open dialogue with Iran.

The mother of all conflicts in the world that has deeply troubled the global Muslim community and has fueled much anger is the decades old Israel-Palestine conflict. The latest manifestation is recent invasion of

Gaza. The loss of life and property of innocent civilians is deeply disturbing to people of goodwill across the world.

The only way to achieve peace is for moderates to come together with the will to sacrifice for peace. This cannot be done without the leadership of the United States playing the role of honest broker. On this issue, the new administration has an opportunity to take a giant step in gaining the respect and goodwill of the Islamic world.

In a speech given at the American Israel Public Affairs Committee Policy Forum on March 2, 2007, Mr. Obama said: "We can and we should help Israelis and Palestinians both fulfill their national goals: two states living side by side in peace and security."

Both the Israeli and Palestinian people have suffered from the failure to achieve this goal. The United States should leave no stone unturned in working to make that goal a reality."

Less than a week into his administration, the new president appointed former Senator George Mitchell as the US envoy to the Middle East: "It will be the policy of my administration to actively and aggressively seek a lasting

peace between Israel and the Palestinians as well as Israel and its Arab neighbours." Further, unlike his predecessor, the incoming president expressed his deep concern at the loss of civilian lives and by the suffering in Gaza. He said his heart "goes out to civilians who are going without food, water or medical care."

On the first day as president, he called four leaders in the Middle East, three of whom lead Muslim countries -- this was a powerful symbolic step, one that was urgently called for. The invitation to Dr. Ingrid Mattison the first women and the first convert to Islam to have become the president of the Islamic Society of America (ISNA) to participate in the National Day of Prayers with other religious leaders was another important symbolic step towards rebuilding relations with millions of American Muslims who voted for him in overwhelming numbers.

To further undermine the cause of the extremists and those who would use violence, the Obama-Biden administration should take a page from Secretary Colin Powell's comments made just prior to the elections on October 19, 2008. He argued forcefully that American people must put an end to the notion that we do not fully trust Muslim citizens in America.

If the new administration teams up with its Muslim citizens in the global war on terrorism and religious extremism, it will find that the American Muslim community eager to turn the page and build a healthy relationship based on trust and mutual respect. This will go a long way in changing the negative perception of the United States many in the Muslim world hold today.

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Political use of religion

FROM PAGE 4

had outbidden other rulers in declaring Islam as the state religion.

The Awami League had in the late nineties its own stint in power, but failed to show its courage of conviction in relation to secularism and did not take any move to restore it to the constitution. This, however, was understandable. The Bangladesh Nationalist Party and its companion, the Jamaat-e-Islami, had taken to the using of religion for electoral success in a manner which obliged the Awami League to turn to religion, even if reluctantly. Madrasa education, which has proved to be an easy breeding ground for terrorist outfits has been promoted by both parties almost on a competitive basis with the intention of getting votes.

Capitalism is not religious, either in its character or its conduct, but it makes free of religion to face its arch-enemy, communism. The story of the rise of the Talibans is well-known. The Americans nurtured them with arms and madrasa education to fight the Soviet forces in Afghanistan. With the withdrawal of the Soviet army from Afghanistan and the disintegration of Soviet Union itself the Talibans needed an enemy for their sustenance, and they have found it in the Capitalists. Ideologically, the Talibans are not anti-capitalist; far from it, they believe in capitalism, ideologically speaking. But what they find themselves up against is the secular dispensation of capitalism, which they feel inclined to call crass materialism.

The Pakistani military rulers had been, with American aid generously given and received, warmly hospitable to the nurturing of the Talibans in Pakistani madrasas. But now that the monster has come out of the bottle, the

Among the Palestinians there are Christians as well, and indeed when Palestinian Resistance Movement began to work its leadership included well-known Christians. The resistance was really secular. It was because of the brutal belligerency coupled with the divisions created within the resistance movement itself by Israeli-American machinations that has made the emergence of the Hamas inevitable. The Hamas has been listed as terrorist by the so-called international community, whereas in reality it is Israeli state which is the worst of the terrorists active in the Middle East. The Palestinians have turned to the Hamas, because its members are patriotic freedom-fighters prepared to lay down their lives to liberate their motherland.

ruled class in Pakistan is finding it painfully difficult to put up with it, let alone control it. Meanwhile, the people in the outlying areas have become exposed to American bombing on the plea of killing the terrorists.

Israel does not have to make use of religion for political purposes, for it is, by definition, a religious state; in fact the only religious state in the modern world worthy of that name. Its occupation of the land belonging to the Palestinians, in which action it is being fully backed by the USA and the members of the Jewish community all over the world, has taken on a religious character -- for it is an organised Zionist state which is seeking to destroy the prospects of the setting up of a Palestinian nationalist state. Among the Palestinians there are Christians as well, and indeed when Palestinian Resistance Movement began to work its leadership included well-known Christians. The resistance

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Of all the states in the Arab world, Iraq used to be the most secular. Thanks to George Bush's crusade, Iraq has been torn to pieces, with the Shias and Sunnis killing each other on a daily basis. The invaders were Christians, they had declared themselves to be so, and therefore, not unexpectedly, the Iraqi resistance has taken on a religious character. Like the Taliban, the Al

Quida was once promoted by the USA, because of its anti-communist stance, and is now fighting its mentor, in the absence of the enemy it was once set up to fight.

Iran's revolution could and should have been led by the leftists. Indeed they were the leading force behind the overthrowing of the Shah, the mighty emperor who was god-like in his assumptions. The leftists failed to take over state power and the capitalist world was not particularly unhappy to see that the worst had not happened. In their perception, the Islamic fundamentalists were bad enough, but not as evil as the communists. Yet Iran has now become an enemy because its rulers are a threat to the supremacy of Israel in the Middle East.

The rise of fundamentalism threatening the secular structure of the state in Turkey and Algeria is not so much due to the strength of fundamentalism as to the weakness of the capitalism put

into practice by the rulers. The Turks and the Algerians are dissatisfied; they have their grievances which they could have ventilated had the leftists been allowed to function. But since the left has been and is being persecuted, people have turned to the right, and what has happened in Iran may not be unlikely to happen in Algeria and Turkey too.

In Africa, particularly in Nigeria and Somalia, tribal rivalry has been forced to take on a religious character by the interference of the capitalist world who want the strife to continue in the interest of its own economic and political hegemony.

Some of the catholic priests in Latin America have set up an example of going against capitalist aggression. As is to be expected, they do not have the approval of the Vatican in this political stand.

Thus to the political use of religion has had not one but many faces, and all the faces had been connected with the question of power. Alongside the abuses, religion in politics has helped anti-imperialist resistance. But the victim has always been secularism. Secularism does not necessarily ensure democracy; but it is impossible to have democracy without secularism. With the disintegration of the USSR, secularism has suffered a setback and religious fundamentalism has become more rampant than it was before. But the real villain of the piece is capitalism itself which promotes fundamentalism by breeding inequality, poverty and discontent, and at the same time uses religion to hide its designs of material exploitation.

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