

## Old Style, New Conflict

One are the days of communist hysteria. Communist threat to American supremacy is history, albeit North Korea's defiance despite the continuing 'carrot and stick' policy for the last 50 years may be treated as a minor irritation. The way the nuclear explosive test by North Korea on 9th October is condemned by Security Council members with America in the forefront and China joining the chorus is nothing but sheer hypocrisy. Uncle Sam may ignore North Korea's challenge for the time being. The Bush administration at the moment is doubly burdened by the growing muslim anger at home and abroad—they are more concerned about 'non-state enemies', not nuclear theatre of Korean peninsula.

In the 1960s America used to purchase and bribe communist and left intellectuals throughout the world to sabotage Vietnam's anti-imperialist struggle while pampering the established media for playing its bit by way of publishing articles questioning the strength of Vietnam communist guerillas. Arab world apart, they—the American strategists—are now targeting some third world countries with huge muslim population. And quite naturally India gets top priority in their scheme.

Of late, particularly following the events of 11 September 2001, several western and American organisations based in Delhi have launched programmes ostensibly seeking to 'engage' with Muslims. Some of these are funded by their respective governments. While the need for cross-cultural dialogue, particularly between the 'West' and the 'Muslim world', is obviously urgent, the orientation of many of these programmes is clearly skewed. Rather than aiming to promote serious dialogue between Muslims and the 'West', some of these programmes seem motivated almost entirely by narrowly-defined 'security concerns', and aimed at defending western governments' imperialist policies and interests. This, of course, can hardly be called serious dialogue at all, even though this may be touted about as such.

One such western organisation in Delhi runs a programme under which batches of maulvis from madrasas are sent to a western country for short trips, all expenses paid for. Muslim academics and journalists are also being offered generous fellowships to spend time in this country. The aim of all this expense and effort, critics argue, appears to be to dampen Muslim opposition to the imperialist policies of this country and to enlist the support of key Muslim public opinion makers to convince Muslims that this particular country is not motivated against them or their faith. At the same time, this country, headed by a war-mongering Christian fanatic, continues with its murderous wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Vietnam era is back with a difference.

Another Western organisation based in Delhi has recently launched an ambitious research project, ostensibly aiming at studying various aspects of Indian Muslim society and religion. The director of the project, whose knowledge of the Indian Muslims appeared to be very limited, made it evident, despite his

denials, that the project was essentially driven by security concerns, to counter Muslim critiques of or opposition to Western hegemony.

In a meeting the said director made it amply clear as to how he viewed the world: Radical Islamists, he argued, were fired by an irrepressible zeal for martyrdom. He seemed to suggest that they had no real political goal that they glorified violence just for the sake of it. In other words, what he appeared to argue was that radical islamism had no social, political, economic or cultural roots or causes, it was as if it existed in thin air, a mere ideological phenomenon, unrelated to socio-political reality. It was as if Western brutalities, imperialism, Zionism, Christian fundamentalism and the capitalist system, had nothing to do with mass Muslim unrest, which was translated into support for Islamist groups in large parts of the 'Muslim world'.

If they were truly serious about dialogue and preventing the 'clash of civilisations' thesis from coming true, indeed, if they were honest to themselves, they ought to reflect on their own policies in Iraq, Palestine, Afghanistan, Lebanon and elsewhere which were determined to worsen relations between Muslims and the West. When it suited the West, America in particular, to court radical Islamists, to take on the Societs in Afghanistan or leftist and nationalist forces in large parts of the 'Muslim world', it had willingly done so. The West's concern about radical Islamists, therefore was hardly consistent and principled. Western economic and cultural imperialism were only further adding to the appeal of Islamism as an ideology of protest.

Some western governments and the official initiatives they have sponsored to 'engage with the Muslim world' are actually hostile to genuine dialogue even while they claim to be engaged in it. Dialogue is impossible if one sees oneself as blameless and in no need of reform at all, and, instead, locates the cause of conflict solely in the other. It appears that some Western governments as well as the radical Islamists whom they decry are entirely identical on this score, seeing themselves as completely beyond reproach, blaming the other for the increasingly tense relations between the 'West' and the 'Muslim world'. And that precisely is why some much-touted and heavily-funded efforts to 'engage' with the 'Muslim world' sponsored by western governments will probably find few serious Muslim takers. ✍✍✍