

In a desperate bid to win Arab support for attacking Iraq, the US administration is launching an aggressive campaign to promote democracy throughout the Arab world. Recently, a senior US administration official remarked, "There's not a single democracy in the 22 nations of the Arab League. Why should that be the case?" By doing so, the US government is hoping to placate the hearts and minds of the Arab people towards the US and reduce their appetite for radical Islam. But many Muslims regard America's latest attempt to democratise the Arab world as a mere pretext for its occupation, rather than its liberation.

For America and her western allies to succeed in bringing democratic order to the Arab world the idea of democracy must take root amongst the people.

But since September 11 American duplicity towards democracy has greatly undermined Western efforts to make democratic change acceptable to the masses. Several factors have contributed to hardening of Muslim attitudes towards democracy.

In America's war against Afghanistan, the West saw nothing wrong in forsaking democratic principles and allying themselves with despotic regimes throughout the Muslim world. The most prominent of such alliances was with Afghanistan's autocratic neighbours who had a long history of brutally oppressing their Muslim populations. In return for their support, the despotic regimes of Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kazakhstan were rewarded with western aid and equipment, which was used to further suppress their people. Special treatment

Democracy or Occupation?

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was meted out for General Musharraf, who overnight abandoned Afghanistan in exchange for providing unstinting support for America's so called war on terror. General Musharraf once regarded as the usurper of democracy became the new darling of the West. As a result of this treacherous alliance the Taliban regime collapsed and the West imposed a new government consisting of ruthless warlords led by the American puppet Hamid Karzai. The government neither represented the people nor enjoyed their popular support.

Despite this democracy charade, the West still chose to describe the new regime as an emerging democracy. This incident described as the 'first stage' in the war against terror only enhanced the perception in Muslim minds that as far as the Muslim world was concerned the West purely favoured tyranny over its liberation.

Soon after the demise of the Taliban, India's genocide of Gujarati Muslims and Israel's vicious massacre of Palestinians was greeted with muted criticism from Western circles. Despite the dominance of fundamentalists in both governments the West refused to label India and Israel as terrorist states and preferred to describe them as model examples of emerging democracies in their respective regions. This prompted many Muslims to compare the present position taken up by the West with the

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one adopted towards the triumph of the FIS in the Algerian elections and the Rafah party taking power in Turkey. Muslims could only conclude that the West despised the emergence of political Islam via the ballot box and would do its utmost to prevent it from materialising in Muslim countries.

Roughly at the same time, Muslims across the world, observed at first hand, Western democracy in its true light. The Israeli intransigence in Palestine, the Enron scandal and the ongoing preparations for attacking Iraq brought to the fore a small collection of powerful interest groups responsible for shaping American politics. Muslims could clearly see how the Jewish lobby, the oil cartels and the defence companies had manipulated the democratic process through the use of media and campaign funds to bring about the present US administration. In return, the US

administration took full advantage of the law-making process and enacted laws and formulated policies, which strongly favoured the agendas of these powerful groups. The whole episode left an indelible impression on Muslim minds that democracy solely serves powerful interest groups. And if democratic elections were to be held in their respective countries the present autocratic rulers would be replaced by a civilian dictatorship. A good example of this feeling can be gauged from the recent Pakistani elections, where the number of people casting votes was exceptionally small in comparison to previous elections.

Added to the aforementioned points is the widespread perception that since the destruction of the Khilafah in 1924 and the subsequent nominal independence of Arab countries, not a single Western power has seriously bothered to bring democracy to the Arab world - all have been content with the present status quo. So naturally most people are asking: "why now?" Given these strong feelings and perceptions amongst Muslims, it is difficult to see how the American government or indeed her western allies can galvanise support amongst the Arab masses and bring about democratic change. Without popular support the only option left would be to invade an Arab country and impose some semblance of democracy - like Afghanistan for instance.

By all accounts, such an action can only be described as illegal occupation. Not bothered about the consequences of violating international law, American officials are already contemplating such a move. A recent article published in the *New York Times* foretells of a plan to occupy Iraq and to put it under the direct command of a US General.

The truth of the matter is that America and her western allies are fully aware of these feelings and perceptions and know only too well that they have lost the intellectual battle to convince Muslim minds of democracy and other futile western concepts. They also know that the driving force behind these strong feelings and perceptions is Islam, which directly threatens the existence of all the regimes in the Muslim world and in turn western interests. Faced with this situation, the West can no longer rely on these regimes to continue to safeguard their interests. So once again the West is ready to repeat the feat of her crusading forefathers and physically occupy the Muslim world in a desperate attempt to defend their interests from Islam.

In the past the West was successful at physical occupation of parts of the Muslim world for long periods of time and fully benefited from the resources of the Muslim people. This was due to the decline in Islamic thinking and the fascination with western civilisation. Now with the strong Islamic revival in its ascendancy and the growing rejection of western civilisation permeating all parts of the Islamic world, the prospects of physical occupation are entirely different. At stake is the very survival of western civilisation.