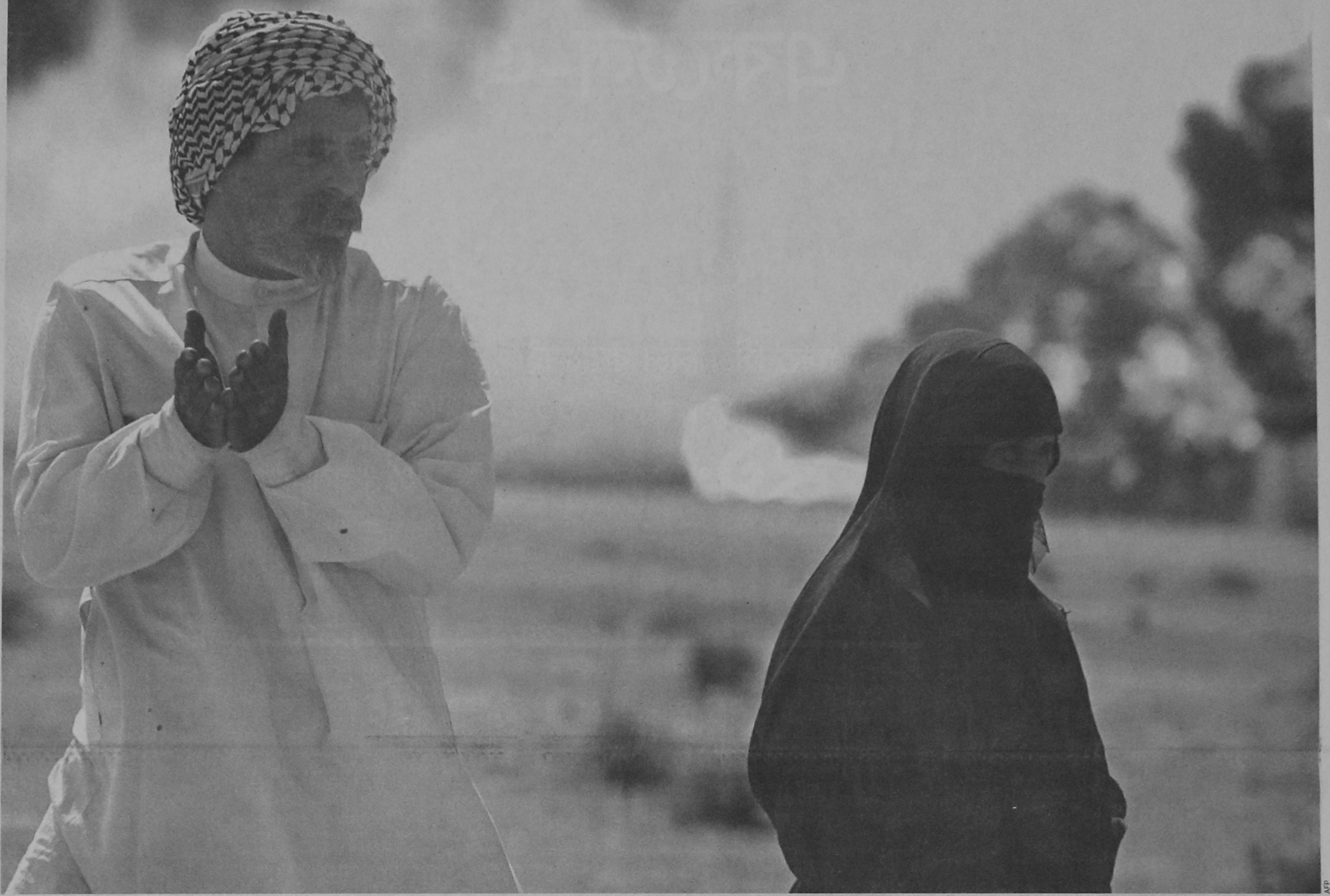


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Liberalism-where is it today?

Case of Indonesia and Egypt

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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 forever.

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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