

DHAKA WEDNESDAY FEBRUARY 25, 2009



Fundamentalism and imperialism

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values. Most importantly, Tarek's razor-sharp critique of some leftist intellectuals condoning Taliban atrocities and portraying them as merely "Pushtoon nationalists" is very timely and insightful. He has aptly cited the yawning gap between the "indigenous" and "foreign" secular/liberal/leftist Muslim perceptions of the so-called Global Jihad. While the former group of Muslim intellectuals, due to their first-hand experience of Islamist terror and intolerance in Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan and other Muslim-majority countries consider the Islamists as backward-looking monsters, their secular/liberal counterparts mostly living in the West, romanticize the Islamists simply as "friends" out of sheer lopsided logic and understanding. He has rightly singled out Pervez Hoodbhoy and Tariq Ali as representatives of the "indigenous" and "foreign" Muslim secular/liberal intellectuals, respectively.

Considering all enemies of your enemy as friends could at most be cynical, at worst counterproductive and dangerous, so goes the main

thrust of Fatah's argument. As innocent victims of Western imperialism in Iran and Afghanistan have been suffering today for preferring Islamists as lesser evils to the pro-Western Shah and pro-Soviet communists respectively, Tarek's warning is very pertinent and timely, especially for the secular/liberal Muslims in countries like Pakistan and Bangladesh. He has appropriately congratulated Pakistani and Bangladeshi (Muslim) voters for their en masse rejection of mullahs as their representatives. What he wants to see in the Muslim secular/liberal camps is solidarity against all forms of imperialism, intolerance and terror, Western and Islamist.

Registering his contempt for many Westernised bourgeoisie in Pakistan, who in his inimitable style, are "infatuated by the Islamists, romanticising them in the same way a yuppie drives a BMW while wearing a Che T-shirt", Fatah has provided an eye-opener for us all. His citing Hoodbhoy to warn the unaware is incisive: "A Taliban victory would transport us into the

darkest of dark ages. These fanatics dream of transforming the country [Pakistan] into a religious state where they will be the law. They stone women to death, cut off limbs, kill doctors for administering polio shots, force girl-children into burqa, threaten beard-shaving barbers with death.... Even flying kites is a life-threatening sin."

One could not agree more with his insightful syllogism drawn from the lessons of history

Thus when Japan attacked the US, its anti-American stance could not be and was never understood to driven by an anti-imperialist doctrine. Similarly, when Hitler's panzer divisions fought advancing American and British troops in Western Europe, only a fool would have placed Nazi Germany into the camp of anti-imperialism.

Today, just because the Taliban or Hezbollah or Iran attack Americans or blow up their embassies and fly planes into the New York Towers, does not mean their anti-Americanism translates into anti-

imperialism [italics mine].

Tarek Fatah has demolished the Trotskyist Tariq Ali's position that Islamist Iran could be considered as "anti-imperialist" while the country practices "unbridled capitalism", where even the sea ports are privatized and trade unions banned. He has appropriately cited Mark Twain as an example of anti-imperialist intellectual in 19th century America, lamenting the fact that there are not that many Mark Twains [let alone a Bertrand Russell or a Noam Chomsky] in the Muslim World; and hardly any voice among Arab Muslims to speak out against "the occupation by Arab countries of Kurdistan, Western Sahara and dare I say, Darfur." He is also critical of Pakistan's sixty-year old military operations in Baluchistan.

His "maverick" (from the conservative Muslim view point) albeit constructive ideas for a rapprochement between the Western and Muslim worlds are timely and commendable. His bridge-building ideas are noteworthy: "The Western tradition is not Western in any essential sense, but only through an

accident of geography and history. Indeed, Islamic learning provided an important resource for both the Renaissance and the development of science [in the West]. The ideas we call 'Western' are in fact universal, laying the basis for greater human flourishing."

The inherent optimism in Fatah's writings about secular/liberal Muslims uniting to fight Western hegemony without compromising with the Islamists in the long run is noteworthy. One may cite his path breaking book, Chasing a Mirage: The Tragic Illusion of an Islamic State (Wiley, Toronto 2008), in this regard. His stern warning against supporting the Islamists who in the name of fighting the West (which has been both hypocritical and opportunistic) want to establish fascism in the name of religion is very well-timed and laudable. Most definitely, Tarek Fatah is the voice of "liberal Islam" for Muslim regeneration, enlightenment, progress and above all, "peace within and peace without", the cardinal principle of Islam.

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