

People power in the Middle East

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FROM his weekly perch at CNN, Fareed Zakaria, speculated last Sunday (or the Sunday before) whether George Bush could take credit for the events that were unfolding in Tunisia, whether this was the late fruit of the neoconservative project to bring 'democracy' to the Middle East.

It is quite extraordinary watching Zakaria -- a Muslim born and raised in India, and scion of a leading political family -- mimic with such facility the language of America's ruling classes, and show scarce a trace of empathy for the world's oppressed, despite his propinquity to them by reason of history and geography. He does have a bias for India, but here too he only shows a concern for India's strategic interests, not the interests of its subjugated classes, minorities and ethnicities. This I offer only as an aside about how easy it is for members of the upper classes in countries like India, Pakistan or Egypt to slip into an American skin whenever that dissimulation offers greater personal advantages.

As a cover for deepening US control over the Middle East -- here is the latest civilising mission for you -- the neoconservatives in the Bush administration argued that the Islamic world produces "terrorists" because it lives under autocracies. To solve the "terrorist" problem, therefore, the US would have to bring democracy to the Middle East. This demagoguery only reveals the bankruptcy of America's political class. It is a shame when the president of the United States and his neoconservative puppet-masters peddle such absurdities without being greeted by squeals of laughter -- and shouted down as hypocritical, as farcical.

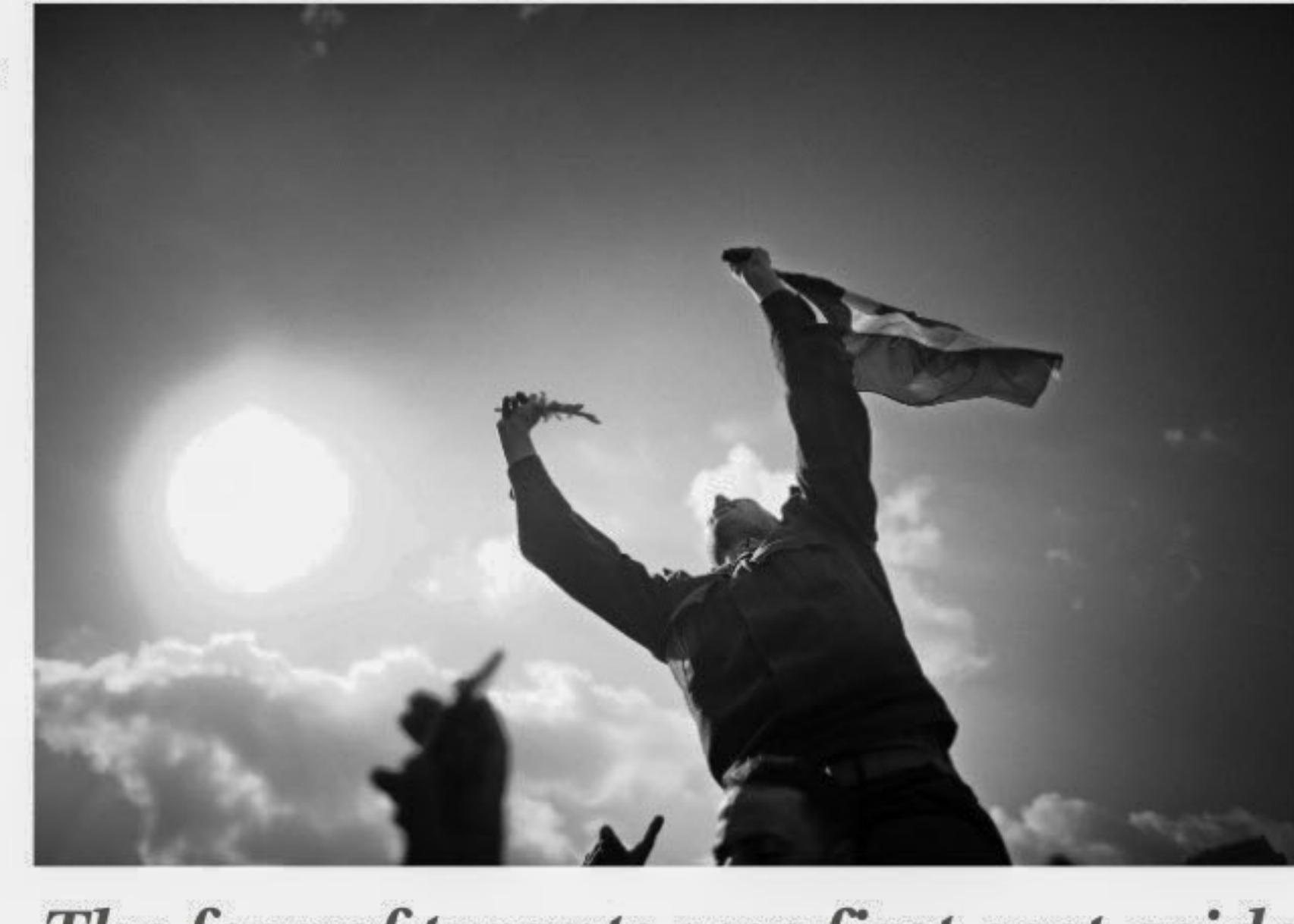
Which country has been the

leading ally and sponsor these past decades of nearly all the despots in the Middle East -- those of royal pedigree and others seeking to become royalties?

Regardless, the real plan of United States failed miserably. It was dispatched to its grave by a people's resistance in Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Yet, George Bush and his neoconservative allies can take some credit for the wave of protests that is spreading across the Middle East -- from Tunisia and Algeria to Egypt and Yemen. The US invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan, its attacks on Pakistan, interventions in Somalia and Yemen, its shame-faced support for Israel's murderous wars against the Palestinians and the Lebanese, and its deepening sanctions and daily threats against Iran have produced one result for sure: they have accelerated the pace of history in this part of the world.

The imperial dictum of the United States during its global war against "terrorism" -- you are with us or you are against us -- forced nearly all the Muslim potentates to kowtow openly before their masters. As the duplicity of these potentates deepened, this shame became impossible to hide. Indeed, on several occasions, they were forced to flaunt their true colours. Saudi Arabia and Egypt openly blamed Hezbollah when Israel launched its bombing and invasion of southern Lebanon in July 2006; they repeated this performance again when Israel began its massacres in Gaza in December of 2008. Saudi Arabia has been ready to relinquish sovereign rights over its airspace, should Israel want to launch an attack against Iran. Indeed, WikiLeaks has revealed that the Saudis were urging their masters to "cut off the snake's head" -- that is, launch a war against Iran. Openly, Egypt has been



the Tunisians; within weeks their tyrant boarded a jet and fled across the Mediterranean. The sparks from this conflagration have now spread both west and east -- to Algeria, Egypt, and Yemen. In the days ahead, it may spread to Sudan, Jordan, Libya, Morocco, and who knows where else. Perhaps, Saudi Arabia and the other oil-wells disguised as countries, as sheikhdoms, may remain immune to this conflagration -- as they remained immune to the earlier conflagration of Arab nationalism. But their time too will come -- it will come in other ways.

This is not a declaration of victory -- for that is still far away. The forces of tyranny and reaction -- in cahoots with their puppet masters in the United States, Israel, Britain and France -- will use brute force to suppress the rise of people power, they will use every subterfuge to deceive the people, and they will find many allies in upper and middle classes enriched by the terrorist regimes they have served. The people will stand up to the brute force that will be brought against them. They will see through the deceptions of the threatened regimes -- the half-measures that will be professed to break the momentum of the people's movements. The Tunisians have seen through the pathetic ploys of their so-called coalition government and are demanding the departure of all the members of Ben Ali's cohort of bandits.

It is impossible to predict how this new historical phase, how this remaking of the Middle East will proceed. The Western media declares that the protests unfolding before us are leaderless, but that is only because they cannot see the leaders. Certainly, there are leaders emerging even now on the ground, from the ranks of workers, students, teachers, engineers, lawyers and doctors, from the cohorts of the

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collaborating with Israel to tighten the deadly noose around Gaza.

The most egregious case of this surrender of potentates is the one presented by the Palestinian Authority. The treachery of the PLO against its people had begun in 1993 with the Oslo Accords. Over the last ten years, they have carried this surrender to its logical conclusion. The top henchmen of the PA have castrated themselves to become Israeli eunuchs, openly and secretly cheering Israel's total war against Gaza and the strangulation of the West Bank.

Did these surrenders, sellouts, humiliations go unnoticed by the peoples of this region stretching from Mauritania and Egypt to Pakistan and Indonesia?

It is true that the "Arab street" -- the West's choice words for denigrating people's will in the Middle

East -- did not explode into action at the American invasion of Iraq, but many in Iraq did deliver their message quite forcefully to the Americans -- both Iraq's Shi'as and Sunnis. If the people did not speak out then, it was because they stood against brutal dictatorships and despots that had established an iron grip over their lives. Yes, the people had been cowed by the brutality of these regimes: but they were not without resolution, they were not without a determination to overthrow their bondage. They were only waiting for their chance, for some spark that would ignite their hearts and reduce to cinders their fear of arrests, torture and killings that would be brought upon them by their tormentors.

Now that moment is here. The fear of tyrants was first cast aside by

unemployed, from the archipelago of prisons where these regimes have tortured their victims. Of the cadres of older leaders, many are still in prison others planning their return from forced exile. If these older leaders hesitate to join the protests, to offer leadership, they will be replaced by new cadres of younger, untainted and more vigorous leadership.

Yes, the neoconservatives may well take some credit for this ominous (for them) turn of events. By their stupendous overreach, this clan of conspirators has done much harm to their host country. In the wake of the wars they have unleashed, forcing the US to spend trillions on the military, its competitors have been stealing the march, leaving it behind in one field after another. Now this has been duly acknowledged by President Obama in his State of the Union address.

The events unfolding mark yet another attempt by an important segment of the Islamicate to end the stasis of history imposed upon them. Starting with the industrial programs of Mohammad Ali Pasha in the early decades of the 19th century, Western powers have reversed several previous attempts by the Arabs to re-enter the stage of history. Will the Western powers again choose to stand in the way of this new beginning? Almost certainly, they will try both overtly and covertly. Is it possible that this time such obstructionism is too late -- and counterproductive as well? In the early 1920s, the Western powers failed to dismember Turkey. They have failed to derail the Iranian revolution. Can they now stand up against another surge of people power in the Arab world, in Afghanistan and Pakistan -- and beyond?

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IT may not be an overstatement to state that during the last two years of the present government the most successful formulation of its policy is the education policy because this is the only one which has been accepted by most people. However, it may be advisable to be cautiously optimistic about the success at the implementation stage because of the huge size of the project.

We are, however, hopeful about its success because people are aware that successful implementation of this policy will mean increase in the rate of literacy and decrease in poverty. People, however, must be ready to allow enough time for its full implementation.

The core of the policy is primary education, which determines the future of the nation. The main objective of primary education is to give direction in building a nation. This needs inclusion of such subjects in the curriculum that help in mental development. Thus, it appears that there is no need for making religious education compulsory. It may be made optional from class 8.

There is some controversy about the competence and morality of existing teachers. The new policy has given attention to the need for attracting meritorious persons to teaching.

One of the reasons for decline of our educational standard is unemployment, which has converted higher education into mass education. The new policy suggests that higher education is not proper for all. It has advised due emphasis on technical education because it will increase the prospect of jobs for trained personnel.

Article 17(a) of the Bangladesh Constitution states that there should be a uniform, mass-oriented and universal education system. Differences between systems tantamount to violation of the constitution.

Education is essential for building a wealthy, conscious and

Implementing new education policy

civilised nation. That is why it has to be universal. The educational structure which we inherited from our British rulers has passed through different stages, and the present system is secular. Its first

recognition for Fazil as equivalent to a Bachelors degree and Kamil to Masters. However, they have not yet been able to acquire this privilege.

The principal aim of education



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step is primary, the second is lower-middle, the third is middle and the fourth is higher education.

At present, the general and the madrasa education systems exist side by side. There is no age limit at primary level in the system. The madrasa levels are Dakhil, Alim, Fazil and Kamil. Madrasa authorities demand

to build good quality efficient students. This cannot be provided by the present system. The system also does not create any sense of citizenship and equality. Some existing systems are not even consistent with our Constitution.

Management of the education system is weak. In some areas, training of teachers has been

ignored. Participation of the people, particularly elected representatives, in managing educational institutions is not clear though it is necessary.

The state spends money to make a person literate, to make him a good citizen who can be self-sufficient. Bangladesh is behind her neighbours in South-East Asia because of her backwardness and poverty. This is particularly evident at mid-level. It may be pointed out in this regard that the south-eastern countries spend \$300 to \$400 per capita, whereas Bangladesh spends only around \$12 a year.

No appreciable development could be made in the field of education in Pakistan during 1947-71. The Dr. Kudrat-e-Khuda Commission was set up after our independence. The Commission's report is, broadly speaking, consistent with the UN resolution. Between 1975 and 1990 no remarkable development could be made under the military dictatorships. This period is regarded by some education experts as the period of the backward journey of our education system.

There is no option but to improve the quality of our teachers, particularly primary teachers, if we want to make Bangladesh a modern mid-level country within a decade. This needs attracting better students to the job of primary teachers, improving teacher-student ratio and providing modern educational aids to primary schools.

The government has undertaken implementation of the recommendations of the Prof. Kabir Committee, which will be a huge task. It involves high cost, recruitment of good quality teachers, improvement of school infrastructure, support from guardians, and from the national and local governments. At the initial stage we may seek financial and technical aid from multilateral donor agencies. Above all, we have to allow enough time and give whole-hearted support for successful completion of the project.

The writer is a former Joint Secretary.

Domestics smarter than bosses



IT'S official. Domestic helpers are smarter than employers. Having high emotional intelligence (a typical domestic helper skill) is a much greater achievement than having a high IQ (a typical employer skill), according to a raft of sources, the latest being a New York Times column on "Tiger mom" Amy Chua last week.

What's more, the most capable people also have a high Adversity Quotient (the ability to endure bad situations without complaining), researcher Dr Paul Stoltz discovered -- another key characteristic of helpers.

"Domestics are given stupid instructions from idiots 12 to 16 hours a day for years on end, and don't fuss, said a psychologist who did not want to be named. "Most employers, me included, wouldn't last 12 minutes."

Yes, domestics don't complain -- but they do sometimes take revenge, so nice to them.

At my noodle shop, everyone agreed these women were smart except one guy, who said: "If they're so smart, how come they're domestic helpers?"

A guy in a suit responded: "Earning cash in an expensive place to spend in a cheaper place is a smart game plan, used by OFWs (overseas foreign workers) and expat bankers."

Reader E. Leung, in a comment on this page on Friday, said: "My helper is much smarter than I am. For a start, she manages to send part of her wages home despite the pittance she gets paid. I am seriously thinking of asking her for lessons in keeping costs down."

My helper is a miracle worker. But she's been away for several weeks, so we've had to look after ourselves. My family members learned that if we all got up really early and worked our fingers to the bone until late at night, we still utterly failed to prevent our home descending into filth and chaos.

"I reckon our helper is ten times smarter than I am," I told my wife.

She shook her head. "I can't believe that. Only ten times?"

This amazing Filipina woman can do a super-tough Sudoku puzzle in 15 minutes. I tried one from the same book, and I am still working on it, five weeks later. I expect to finish in 2015 with the help of IBM's Deep Blue super-computer.

At the bus stop, I asked some domestics if they agreed that they were often smarter than their bosses.

"We all know that, sir," said one.

"But we keep it secret. It's more polite."

But they were happy to share their top seven "stupid employer tricks," after I promised not to identify them:

1) "My employer asked me for the recipe for boiling rice;"

2) "My employer thinks an AM radio station is one which only has morning shows;"

3) "My employer can't use the washing machine, though it's only got one button;"

4) "The cable TV control is so complicated it made my employer cry;"

5) "My employer folded up the stroller without taking the baby out;"

6) "My employer uses paper plates on Sundays because she doesn't know how to wash dishes;"

And the number one stupid employer trick?

1) "The front door has three keys which have to be used in the right order. On my day off, my employer can't get into his own home."

For more on stupid employer tricks log on to www.vittachi.com