

AMANA

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**Demonization of Russia in
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This unique world is blessed with natural resources and enriched by communities of diverse ethnicities, religions and cultures. At the same time there have been continuous struggles to establish peaceful and egalitarian

societies. Millions of people suffered from cast and class discrimination, slavery, colonialism and wars. The communists succeeded to capture state power and establish a version of socialism in a number of countries with a promise of building a just and egalitarian society but failed. In many countries democracy prevailed, but so did capitalism which in many ways reshaped the world into a more vertical one with an increase in the gap and divide between rich and poor, with large numbers of poor remaining deprived and excluded.

For ages God's messengers were sent to this world to guide people to a right path. Researchers and scholars evolved theories of governance and brought scientific innovations towards meeting peoples' basic needs and realizing higher aspirations of leading healthy, prosperous and dignified lives. But the perpetuation of unjust, repressive and corrupt governance and violation of human rights continues unabated.

Today's common challenges include how to empower people at the base, hold power holders accountable, introduce education to propel transformation towards promoting human dignity and strengthening unity of God's creations.

AMAN since its inception as a progressive Muslim movement has been making efforts to deepen understanding of liberative teachings of Islam towards a peaceful and inclusive society.

In this issue of AMANA, Prof. Kazi Nurul Islam highlights the Islamic inspirations of universalism and religious pluralism in overcoming ongoing crises of sectarianism and extreme views and positions. Prof. Chandra Muzaffar's paper starts with an optimistic note on the declining of the hegemonic power of the United States of America and emergence of Russia, China and India as potential countervailing forces to check the uni-polar

hegemony, possibly resulting in a more justly balanced world.

Ali Ahmed Ziauddin in his paper examines the inherent crisis of capitalism and the prospect of a declining war dependent US economy, thereby affecting ambitions to remain as the only super power. This crisis offers an opportunity to bring about social transformation for the majority in the developing and the least developed countries, thus opening up a potential ground for increased trans-border connectivity towards a shared future.

Robert Reid and Maxine Gay in their article refer to the People's Plan for the 21st Century (PP21), which was initiated as a platform for multi-sectoral peoples' movements, progressive intellectuals and civil societies to debate, analyze and articulate a collective vision of a future world in which no one is left behind.

Dr. Shahiuz Zaman Ahmad in his article narrates the significance of the slow and fraught update process of the 1951 National Register of Citizens (NRC). A process which is currently leading towards depriving millions of Muslims and Hindus in the Indian state of Assam from citizenship which is a cause of major concern.

Dr. Saira Rahman in her researched based paper refers to international laws which consider rape is as a crime against humanity. The world has witnessed this heinous crime in conflict affected areas against women and the latest case is the crime against Rohingya women. She therefore argues that perpetrators of rape cases of Rohingya women must face trial in the International Criminal Court (ICC).

Last but not the least, Ishak Mia Sohel narrates in his article, the planned and cruel processes adopted by the Myanmar military towards the Rohingyas of Rakhine state. This has now been termed as "inference of genocidal intent" in the August 2018 report of a fact-finding mission commissioned by the United Nations Human Rights Council. The Rohingya as a persecuted community deserves global solidarity and hopefully this very strong UN report will lead to some concrete actions.

I hope this issue of AMANA Magazine offers readers a wide range of concerns to reflect and act upon.

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The Qur'ānic Message of Universalism and Religious Pluralism

Dr. Kazi Nurul Islam



Islam is a religion which holds that peace is the *summum bonum* or the highest goal of human beings in life time and that a total surrender to the will of God is the only means of attaining that goal. Until recently, some non-Muslim scholars used the term 'Muhammadanism'

instead of 'Islam'. 'Muhammadanism' seemed to them to carry the implication of the worship of Muhammad, just as Christian and Christianity imply the worship of the Christ. The term 'Islam' does not convey any such relationship, it does not point to any particular person, people or country but it is meant for all creation.

The cardinal principle of Islam is a belief in the absolute unity of God. In the very opening Sura or the Chapter of the Qur'an,¹ God has been described as 'al-Rahman' (the Most Merciful), 'al-Rahim' (the Most Gracious) '*Rabb al-alamīn*' (the Lord of the people). It may be mentioned here that the Hebrew Bible or the Old Testament refers to God as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But the Qur'an nowhere refers to God as the God of any particular prophet. ² In fact, God is one and the only Creator of everything in the universe.

It is unfortunate that the teachings of the Qur'an have been misunderstood both by the critics as well as by some of the adherents of Islam. They do not know that the Qur'an advocates rational thinking, promotes scientific reasoning, abhors terrorism, condemns fanaticism and extremism. They do not know and at times they do not want to accept that the Qur'an advocates universalism and religious pluralism. In the present paper there has been an humble endeavour to present the Qur'anic message of universalism and religious pluralism.

First of all, let us see what is meant by the term 'universalism'. Universalism refers to religious, ethical and philosophical concepts with universal application or applicability. In philosophy, universalism is a doctrine or school claiming universal facts that can be discovered and is therefore understood as a being in opposition to relativism. In the context of ethics, the term universal refers to that which is true for all individuals under similar situation. The exact meaning of the term

universalism is different in different religions. ³ By universalism Islam means God's love and concern for the humans throughout the world. Islam holds that God has sent revelations to Prophets throughout human history in order to bring peace and harmony through submission to the will of God.

Now about 'religious pluralism.' Cultural and religious pluralism has a long history from antiquity to contemporary trends in post-modernity. The phenomenon of religious pluralism is one of the most important questions in today's religious thought. Though quite commonly used, the term 'religious pluralism' has several distinct meanings. ⁴ But the most commonly accepted view of religious pluralism is the doctrine of religious tolerance. The society in which people of different faiths and cultural heritage live together is called a pluralistic society. From the Qur'anic perspective, religious pluralism implies a society of harmonious co-existence between adherents of different religions or religious denominations.

In unequivocal terms the Qur'an affirms that the message it contains is explicitly universal. Riffat Hassan, one of the prominent contemporary scholars of comparative religion, rightly claims that anyone who has read the Qur'an without bias is aware that Islam is truly universal in its ideals. ⁵ This is quite evident from some verses of the Qur'an.

In Sura 10 (*Yunus*): 47 it is stated that God has messengers for every nation. In Sura 35 (*Al-Fatir*): 24 God says that there was never a community without any warner. Sura 38 (*Sad*): 87 states that this divine writ is no less than a reminder to all the worlds. Sura 81 (*At-Takwir*): 27 and 28 assert that this message is a reminder to all mankind, to everyone who wills to walk a straight way. The Sura *Baqara* states: "Beware of a Day when you will be returned to God: every soul will be paid in full for what it has earned, and no one will be wronged." (2:281)

That the spirit of Islam is pluralistic and broad-based is evident from some verses of the Qur'an. Being the Creator of the universe and God sends guidance to all humanity. That is why the Muslims are commanded by the Qur'an to affirm the divine messages given to all the previous Prophets. Muslims, as an indispensable part of their faith (*Iman*), are bound to affirm that they believe in God and in His angels, in His sacred Books and in His messengers, in the Day of Judgment and in the apportionment of good and

evil from Him on the day of resurrection. It is not only that Muslims are required to affirm the continuity of Islam with previous revelations and Prophets, they are not even allowed, under any circumstance, to make any distinction amongst them. Islam can claim a glorious uniqueness on the issue of religious freedom. But unfortunately, Islam has been misunderstood by its critics and many of its adherents as well. There is a gulf of difference between the teachings of Islam and the dealings of some Muslims in this sensitive area. The Qur'an categorically states that there is no coercion in matters of faith: "There is no compulsion in religion." (Surah 2 *Al-Baqarah*: 256). This verse, like many other verses in the Qur'an, guarantees freedom of religion and worship.

According to the teachings of the Qur'an, non-Muslims living in Muslim states must enjoy the freedom to follow their own faith-traditions without any kind of fear or harassment. There are many verses in the Qur'an which clearly state that the responsibility of Prophet Muhammad was not to compel anyone to believe, but to communicate the message of God.

It should be remembered that the Qur'an promotes religious freedom not only of the believers in God but also of the atheists and worshipers of nature and so on. The Qur'an states, "Believers, do not revile those they call on beside God in case they, in their hostility and ignorance, revile God." (Surah 6 *Al-An'am*: 108)

It should be noted here that Qur'anic instruction "There shall be no coercion in matters of faith" applies not only to non-Muslims but also to Muslims. The Qur'an does not prescribe any punishment for non-profession or renunciation of faith, because the decision regarding a person's ultimate destiny in the life after death and on the Day of Judgment rests with God alone.

In the contemporary world, partly because of continued hate campaign against Islam through electronic and printed media and partly because of certain activities of some misguided Muslims, Islam has earned extremely bad name. Now in the Western world Muslims are branded as terrorists and killers. But if we go through the teachings of the Qur'an we can easily find rather a completely different picture of Islam and Muslim. In fact, the Qur'an upholds the sanctity and absolute value of human life.

Not only to speak about condemning terrorism, the Qur'an does not even permit harsh behavior towards anybody. In fact, the Qur'an advocates gracious conduct and tolerance towards persons who hold different religious and ethical viewpoints.

The Qur'an considers the diversity of peoples as well as religious pluralism as God's Divine Plan. In the

Qur'an there are references both to the unity and diversity of mankind. It is stated in the Qur'an: "People, We created you all from a single man and a single woman, and made you into nations and tribes so that you should get to know one another." (Surah 49 *Al-Hujrat*: 13)

"All people were originally a single community, but later they differed. If it had not been for a word from your Lord, the preordained judgement would already have been passed between them regarding their differences." (Surah 10 *Yunus*: 19)

"We have assigned a law and a path to each of you. If God had so willed, He would have made you one community, but He wanted to test you through that which He has given you, so race to do good: you differed about." (Surah 5 *Al-Maidah*: 48)

"Each community has its own direction to which it turns: race to do good deeds and wherever you are, God will bring you together. God has power to do everything." (Surah 2 *Al-Baqarah*: 148)

Above verses of the Qur'an are our inspirations to uphold and nurture universalism, religio-cultural pluralism and strive towards an equitable world in which present and future generation live in peace and prosper together leaving no body behind.

Notes and references:

1. The name Qur'an, the proper name of the Sacred Book of the Muslims, occurs several times in the Book itself. This Holy Book speaks of itself by many additional names, e.g. *Al-Furqan* (25:1), that which distinguishes between truth and falsehood, between right and wrong; *Al-Dhikr* (15:9), the Reminder or a source of eminence and glory of mankind; *Al-Muhaimin* (5:48) or the Guardian (of previous revelation); and *Musaddiq* (6:92), confirming the truth of previous revelations.

Cf. Maulana Muhammad Ali, *The Holy Qur'an with English Translation and Commentary*, Ahmadiyya Anjuman Isha'at Lahore Inc., USA, 2002, p.1

2. Cf. Fathi Osman, *Concept of the Qur'an*, MVI Publications, Los Angeles, California, 2nd edition, 1999, p.23.

3. For example, according to Zoroastrian tradition, universalism means to revere the wise and the righteous of all countries. Hinduism is a national religion. Excepting Pure-Non-Dualistic Vedanta of Sankara, the Qualified Non-Dualistic Vedanta of Ramanuja and Brahma Samaj of Raja Rammohan Roy there is little scope of universalism in Hinduism. In Christianity, universalism refers to the belief that all humans can be saved through Jesus Christ and eventually come to harmony in God's Kingdom. In the 17th and the 18th century Europe and America Christian reformers came to believe in a universally loving God and felt that God would grant salvation to all human beings.

4. Cf. Dina L. Eck, "Perspective for Pluralism: Vice and Vision in the Study of Religion," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 2006, PP. 1-34.

5. Riffat Hasan, "Trialogue among the Abrahamic Faiths," *Global Dialogue*, Center for World Dialogue, Vol.2. Number 1, Philadelphia, P.A., 2000, p.49

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The Emergence of a More Equitable Pattern of International Relations?

Dr. Chandra Muzaffar

This is a portion of a paper presented at the Rhodes Forum, in Greece, 3-8 October 2012. It has been modified slightly.



This paper is a modest attempt at offering some tentative thoughts on one of the most momentous changes taking place in the contemporary world: the possible emergence of a more equitable pattern

of international relations with all its implications for global politics and economics.

If a more equitable pattern of international relations is emerging, it is because the global hegemonic power of the United States of America is declining. There are many reasons that explain this. The hegemonic wars that the US has embarked upon for decades since the end of the Second World War --- wars that have become more frequent since the beginning of the 21st century --- are partly responsible for this decline. Apart from sapping its economic strength, these wars have also diverted scarce resources away from infrastructure development. They have distorted national priorities privileging military power at the expense of the well-being of the ordinary citizen.

As the US spirals downwards, new centres of power are coming to the fore. The most notable of them is China. It is China's ascendancy that has astounded the world. Thirty years after abandoning the communist model of development and opening itself to free enterprise and the market, China has become the world's economic powerhouse. Through domestic firms and foreign corporations operating in China, the world's largest nation produces goods for the entire human family. From Bangkok to Buenos Aires, 'Made in China' is a ubiquitous trade label. Both in

manufacturing and trade China is number one.

China also has massive investments everywhere. It has poured billions of yuan into infrastructure development in almost every African state just as it is building oil rigs in Venezuela, a hydroelectric project in Ecuador and a railway system in Argentina.¹ In Asia itself, there is perhaps not a single country that has not benefitted from Chinese investments in manufacturing or infrastructure or from trade ties with China.

In all three continents, the Chinese presence is viewed favourably. For instance, "a 2007 Pew Research Center survey of 10 sub-Saharan countries found that Africans overwhelmingly viewed Chinese economic growth as beneficial. In virtually all countries surveyed, China's involvement was viewed in a much more positive light than America's; in Senegal 86 percent said China's role in their country helped make things better, compared with 56 percent who felt that way about America's role. In Kenya, 91 percent of respondents said they believed China's influence was positive, versus only 74 percent for the United States."²

China's global economic role is a reflection of fundamental strengths in its economy. Its foreign reserves are the largest in the world at 3.24 trillion in June 2012. Its domestic savings rate is high. Its adult literacy rate is now almost 95 per cent. "Shanghai's 15 year-old students were recently ranked first globally in mathematics and reading as per the standardised PISA metric. Chinese universities now graduate more than 1.5 million engineers and scientists annually."³

To enhance its economic ascendancy, China has been in the forefront of a couple of groupings. The BRICS --- Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa--- brings together five large

economies at more or less the same level of development which through joint programmes and initiatives hopes to create a more equitable global system. China is also a founder of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) in which it partners Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, with the aim of further strengthening economic and social cooperation.

As an aside, China's phenomenal economic transformation has also seen China becoming more prominent globally in other areas as well. International sport is one such activity. China's stellar performance at the 2012 Olympics in London which came on the heels of its splendid showing at the Beijing Olympics in 2008, confirms its position as a great sporting nation.

China's successes do not mean that there are no weaknesses in the system which can impact upon its rise. Environmental protection could be better. Issues of governance related to public accountability and integrity should be addressed with greater vigour and sincerity. People's participation in the political process should be enhanced. The gap between those who have-a-lot and those who have-a-little in the cities should be reduced, just as income disparities between urban and rural sectors should be narrowed.

Having said that, no one can deny that the rapid and dramatic rise of China in the last few decades is an amazing achievement without precedent or parallel.⁴ It is an achievement which worries the United States --- the hegemon who fears losing its dominance and therefore seeks to contain and encircle China.⁵

A Post-Hegemonic World

China's phenomenal rise signals the birth of a post-hegemonic world. There are of course sceptics who dispute this. China they say will be the next hegemon.

There is no basis for drawing such a conclusion. For three sets of reasons, it is very unlikely that China will attempt to conquer other lands militarily or usurp their resources through aggression or massacre hundreds of thousands of people in its drive to control and dominate

the world.

One, historically, China has never sought hegemony even when it possessed the strongest fleet in the world during the time of the Ming Dynasty. The commander of the fleet, the famous admiral, Zheng He, made seven voyages to various parts of the world but did not pillage or plunder the lands he visited. It is also a matter of some significance that the land territory that China occupies today is what it was since the Western Han Dynasty (206 BC- 24 AD).

It is true that throughout history China has been obsessed with safeguarding its borders. It has sometimes resorted to force to protect its territorial integrity. But this is quite different from marauding land and ocean in order to subjugate some unknown alien people through barbaric violence.

Two, even in the contemporary period, in spite of China's voracious appetite for oil and gas and other minerals, it has not tried to control the source of these resources. All it wants is access, not control.

Indeed, as I have often pointed out, China is the first nation to emerge as a big power on the world stage that has not resorted to imperial wars or bloody conquests or the usurpation of someone's resources in its ascent up the ladder. To put it in another way, China's rise to power without violence, and through peaceful means, is unique. This is something that the world should appreciate.

Here again, one must concede that when it comes to what it defines as its territorial integrity, China has no qualms about using force. This is what it did in 1962 vis-a-vis India in the dispute over the McMahon Line. In 1974 and 1988, China clashed with Vietnam over the Spratly Islands. But even in such conflicts, China is more inclined towards bilateral talks, negotiations and peaceful settlement.

Three, all said and done, China, the world's second largest economy, is still a poor country and is determined to concentrate upon raising the standard of living of its people in the next three or four decades. Seeking hegemonic power, especially through war and violence, is

certainly not on its agenda. Chinese policy-makers and analysts never cease to remind the world that with 1.3 billion people, "China's per capita GDP is only US 3,800, ranking about 104th in the world, even lower than many African countries. By the United Nations standard of one US dollar a day, 150 million Chinese are still living below the poverty line."⁶

It is also important to note that China is perhaps the only big power that has a clause in its Constitution that repudiates hegemony. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) also renounces hegemony. Every major Chinese leader in the present phase of US helmed hegemony from Deng Xiaoping to Hu Jin Tao has pledged that his country will never ever seek hegemony. This was also the position of the late Chinese Prime Minister, Chou En-Lai.⁷

Apart from historical and contemporary evidence, constitutional guarantees and verbal undertakings that underline China's non-hegemonic character and orientation, one must also acknowledge that the regional and global environment will not allow any one nation to dominate and control regional and international politics and economics. Even within China's immediate neighbourhood, countries such as Japan and South Korea are economically powerful and politically influential. If South and North Korea re-unify over the next two decades - which is not inconceivable - it would be a formidable force which the world will not be able to ignore.

In Southeast Asia, Indonesia and Vietnam, with huge populations and credible economic performances, could well emerge as important players in the future. India is often spoken of as a rising power. Iran has the spiritual strength, the material resources and the human capital to contribute towards a more equitable global order. So has Turkey whose economy and society exhibit some positive traits. Russia, given its history, its resources and its leadership is destined to become a major world actor again. South Africa, Brazil, Argentina, Venezuela and Cuba, among others, all have the potential of emerging as important centres in a post-hegemonic world.

The United States, though no longer a hegemon, will still be a significant player. Its northern neighbour, Canada, will continue to wield some economic clout. And in Europe, there is no doubt at all that Germany which in the midst of the European sovereign debt crisis has remained resilient and viable will be a major force to reckon with well into the future.

There will be other states in all continents that will also rise to the forefront in a post-hegemonic world. The post-hegemonic world I envisage will have multiple centres of power, some more important than others. Even in their exercise of power, these centres would be varied, with some commanding more clout in politics, others exhibiting more economic strength and yet others displaying their prowess in the realm of culture. What is important is that there will be no one dominant centre combining the different manifestations of power and coercing all others into submission.

There is a trend in international relations which, it seems to me, could well strengthen post-hegemonic politics and economics. This is the formation of regional bodies. The alliance of Latin American States (ALBA) would be an example. It should be mentioned in passing that there is an even newer regional grouping from that part of the world called CELAC, The Community of Latin American and Caribbean States, which hopes to enhance cooperation in economic, security and social matters among all the 33 states that constitute the Latin American and Caribbean region.⁸ The creation of BRICS and the evolution of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) constitute obvious challenges to US hegemony. Then there are the older regional entities such as the Arab League or the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) or the South Asian Association for regional Cooperation (SAARC) or the African Union. There are also outfits such as the European Union and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC).

Not all the above bodies will be able to contribute to a post-hegemonic world. In fact, some of them like the Arab League are mere vehicles for the perpetuation of US helmed

hegemony in West Asia and North Africa (WANA). Others - whatever their current orientation - may choose to adjust to a post-hegemonic world as it emerges as the new reality.

A Post-Hegemonic World: What It May Signify

A post-hegemonic world may be less unjust and iniquitous. When power is diffused and dispersed, there is a greater possibility of the different states and regions adjusting to, and accommodating, one another. The interests of the various actors, big and small, will have to be given due consideration. As a result, there will be some sort of equilibrium, a just balance.

I see a degree of justice manifesting itself in a number of areas in a post-hegemonic world.

One, in the observance and implementation of international law.

Because of hegemonic power, political leaders who had fabricated a lie to justify the invasion and occupation of a sovereign nation leading to the massacre of hundreds of thousands of people are not hauled up before the International Criminal Court or some other international tribunal. In a non-hegemonic world, a crime against humanity of such magnitude would not go unpunished.

Two, in the effective and honest functioning of international institutions charged with protecting global peace such as the UN.

Since a number of major wars in the last 67 years are linked directly or indirectly to the hegemon, its clients and proxies, or other big powers, and their pawns, the UN whose primary purpose is to save humankind from the scourge of war, has not been able to play its role. It is hoped that in a non-hegemonic world, the UN will be in a better position to keep the peace.

Three, in defending the dignity of the victims of oppression and aggression wherever they may be.

Here again, the power of the hegemon has been a primary factor in denying justice to one of the longest suffering victims of dispossession in the

contemporary world, namely, the Palestinians. In a non-hegemonic world, one hopes that justice will finally be delivered to them.

Four, in ensuring that iniquities in the global economy are eliminated so that development will bring the greatest benefits to the greatest number of people on earth.

It is largely because of the hegemon and economic elites elsewhere that speculative capital dominates the global economy and neo-liberal capitalism holds sway to the detriment of ordinary women and men. Since some of the leading states in the emerging non-hegemonic world are not beholden to neo-liberal capitalism, there is a possibility that this scourge will be eliminated.

Five, in overcoming some of the impediments that prevent the global community from adopting more effective measures aimed at protecting the environment and saving the planet.

The hegemon and elites in many other societies are averse to dealing with the fundamental causes of the environmental crisis since they impinge upon their vested interests. When hegemonic power disappears, it may be easier to achieve and to implement a just global consensus on saving the planet.

I am sure there are other areas too where the end of hegemonic power and the rise of a non-hegemonic world may bring justice.

However, if justice is to become the leitmotif of a non-hegemonic world, the people as a whole should exhibit a deep and abiding commitment to justice. It should be a vision of justice that is inclusive and universal. Only such a vision will cater for the interests and meet the aspirations of all the states that are part of tomorrow's non-hegemonic world.

For justice to be inclusive and universal, states and regions should have some empathy for the other. Justice, in other words, should be accompanied by compassion. There is yet another value which is also important. This is restraint. It is restraint that indicates that one is disciplining oneself with the interests of the

other in one's heart. Likewise, responsibility is a virtue in a non-hegemonic world. A profound sense of responsibility ensures that power is neither aggrandized nor abused. For if the exercise of power fails to meet ethical standards, hegemonic tendencies may set in - which would be a bane in a non-hegemonic world.

These values and virtues essential for sustaining a non-hegemonic world are embodied in all our great spiritual and philosophical traditions. They are our common legacy. They bind us together as human beings.⁹ They should be at the core of our popular consciousness.

In the ultimate analysis, this is perhaps the most compelling reason why a non-hegemonic world is imperative. If hegemony distorts our humanity, a non-hegemonic world celebrates our humanity.¹⁰

1. See R.Evan Ellis " Chinese Soft Power in Latin America: A Case Study" <http://www.ndu/press/chinese-soft-power-latin-america.html>

2. Dambisa Moyo, "Beijing, a Boon for Africa" The New York Times June 27 2012.

3. Stephen S. Roach "Ten Reasons why China is Different" aljazeera.net 31 May 2011.

4. See Chandra Muzaffar, "The Decline of the United States of America" Eye Asia December 2011.

5. This argument is made in Hegemony: Justice; Peace. The relevant chapter is "Containing China: A Flawed Agenda." Quoted from Dai Bingguo, "Stick to the Path of Peaceful Development" China Daily 13 December 2010.

6. There is a remark from Chou En-Lai on hegemony in Chandra Muzaffar, *Global Ethic or Global Hegemony?* (London: ASEAN Academic Press, 2005).

7. See the chapter entitled, "Encounters between Religions and Civilisations: The Power Dimension" pp. 91-2.

8. See Rachael Boothroyd, "CELAC, Counter-OAS organisation Inaugurated in Caracas" JUST Commentary Vol.12 no. 1, January 2012.

9. The importance of this bond between people of different cultures and religions is a constant theme in the writings of Fred Dallmayr. See for instance Fred Dallmayr *In Search of the Good Life A Pedagogy for Troubled Times* (USA: The University Press of Kentucky, 2007) and Fred Dallmayr *Dialogue Among Civilizations Some Exemplary Voices* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002)

10. I emphasise this in Chandra Muzaffar, "A World in Crisis: The Relevance of Spiritual-Moral Principles: in *Ecologies of Human Flourishing* Donald K. Swearer and Susan Lloyd McGarry (Editors) (Cambridge, USA: Center for the Study of World Religions, Harvard Divinity School, 2011

The full article can be accessed at https://issuu.com/juste-books/docs/world_in_crisis_is_there_a_cure. It is also available in print form with the same title.

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Possibility of a Multipolar World

Ali Ahmed Ziauddin



The Western world celebrated the collapse of the Soviet Union as a victory of capitalism over socialism and declared there was only Western model, thus end of history. And a wise guy had even predicted a clash of civilisation. Well, more than a quarter of a century

later history seems to be back on track of ruthless capitalist competition, and it's the West that seems to be clashing with itself, while the rest of the world are watching bemused. What went wrong?

Ever since the end of the 2nd WW the West has been bragging and lecturing the world of a rule based global capitalist order, completely forgetting they had abandoned this Smithsonian order the day they embarked upon the colonial project. And now when that order is turning topsy-turvy and fast on its way to becoming the Frankenstein monster with the chilling prospect of destroying the entire world, they are busy bickering among themselves. However, it may be a bit premature to expect too much positive results coming out of their squabbling for the rest of the world. Rather it might be wise to look at the causes and prospects it holds for the world.

What the world is witnessing is the latest cycle of inherent crisis of capitalism being displayed at the global theater. In order to discern the present crisis of capitalism one needs to have at least a cursory look at the train of capitalism's history. Boom and bust is the inborn characteristic of capitalist growth. For nearly two centuries the world economy was firmly under the control of 3 or 4 power centres that enabled them to absorb the bust cycles either by waging war among themselves or by creating new captive markets in the colonies. With the entry of the US as a major player in the imperial controlled world order since the late 19th century there was a tectonic shift in the balance of power, resulting eventually in the 1st WW. At the end of that mindless massacre the US treasury became the banker of the world. But when this banker went bankrupt in the face of the next periodic bust cycle of capitalism; the world economy collapsed by end of the next decade, i.e., by the late twenties. No state or region was exempt.

Another global war was needed to come out of that

recession. In the process the US economy once again became the engine of growth for the world economy. But what no one noticed except a few progressive academics like Paul Sweezy and Paul Baran the lubricant of this engine of growth was heavily depended on war industry, meaning it had to go on waging war for its survival. This explains the political-economy of the cold war. These thoughtful scholars and few others were scorned at and branded communists. But that did little to stop the self destructive gravy train of profit accrued from the lucrative arms trade. For all the successive American administration ever since the 2nd WW this was the key to full employment till the late eighties.

Moreover, they actively encouraged deregulation of all other sectors of the economy, a process that started with the delinking of the dollar from gold in 1971. Gradually in real terms what this came to mean was delinking profit from productivity. Speculation was the name of the game. And the most lucrative gambling item was currency, shifting billions of paper money across the world within minutes that wrecked economies on its way by putting hundreds and thousands out of job only to enrich a few. However, the rest of the world was still trading on dollar and the US economy still seemed unshakable. But when the speculators and defense contractors were busy bagging billions of unearned and blood stained money, and the oil barons were seizing control of the oil fields of the world, and the bankers' manipulated world finance, America was losing competitiveness in commodity production. First Japan, then China silently took over.

But that wasn't very worrisome so long this lateral entry didn't interfere with the US imperial reach to impose its will all over the world. This was age old imperial logic at play. So long the Soviet Union remained an irritant this logic operated with restraint. But once it collapsed the US and its allies went berserk. Ever since the US and the NATO's mission is to bend or if need be break any independent minded state with whatever power necessary, hard or soft. The options vary from financial squeezing to interfering in internal policies to outright military invasion. And the excuses range from lack of democracy or human rights violations to harbouring terrorists to regime change to daring to acquire WMDs or even wishing not to trade in dollars. Except a few, no country is exempt from such intrusion. In recent past nearly a dozen states were invaded and ruined. Whatever the cost in

human life or financial assets, imperial writ must prevail.

But flexing muscles doesn't come cheap. The astronomical sums needed for such primitive and hostile acts carried out with cutting-edge weaponry must be paid by someone. For too long the American taxpayers were more than willing to fund such expeditions in order to preserve their empire that paid rich dividend. But at some point fatigue sets in. Yet, the show had to go on. So the US treasury had no choice but borrow. While unregulated speculation was for long fleecing the financial markets the US government was running on borrowed money. At some point a severe crunch had to come. The next round of capitalism's bust cycle arrived in the year 2008. The US economy still hasn't fully recovered from that jolt. And the borrowing is still on. In a way it's reminiscent of the decline of all the erstwhile large empires. It spreads itself too thin. To preserve its writ it goes on projecting power, thus exhausting itself. And third, moral decay sets in. All three are visible in the current US Empire. Once this happens the consensus in ruling circle collapses; the growing acidity among the two parties is a case in point. Next, accord in the imperial alliance breaks down; the growing grumbles against the US in G7 prove the second.

What now? The world is scrambling to deal with the decline of US power. When the banker of last resort and the security guarantor falters the long held international order stumbles. While that may scare some, some others could use that as an opportunity for building new alignments in balancing power, trade, and security to create a new world order. After all that's how world history has evolved over several millennia. But the world is not yet there. The solid structure of alliances, associates, and the wide supportive global network built by Pax Americana over many decades is still holding, though fledging. Perhaps this could be the right time for exploring the prospects of a multiple-polar world that will reflect the aspirations of the worlds 99%.

How to go about it? Can the existing power centers not too happy with brash US domination offer any tangible alternative that may ensure a more equitable world order? It may be worth looking into such a prospect briefly. First, let's consider the EU. Despite the recent outbursts over trade, Iran, and Climate accord in the transatlantic relation, it might be wishful thinking of a meltdown for A. It's absurd for the West Europeans to walk out of US control and remain in NATO. It's impossible for them to build an equally powerful military. And for all the big talks of democracy and human rights their global

influence is limited without NATO's backing. B. Europe is so integrated with the US economy it's not viable for them to part without amputation.

C. Too much hostility with the US may have the potential to break the EU, because the East European states will want to stick with the US no matter what. They have a bag full of anger against Brussels. D. Last but not the least, fear of a strong Russia and radical Islam is so deeply entrenched among the Europeans they will think many times over before breaking with the US. So in all probability they will bark a lot but won't be able bite and eventually fall in line, because deep down the Europeans know much of Trump's allegations on trade related issues are right.

Russia is still economically weak and China is still militarily weak, while India doesn't have a seat at the high table yet. If and that's a very big if the first two can build a military alliance there is hope for a multi-polar world emerging but with deep rooted suspicion between the two it's a wild guess. Despite this skepticism such a possibility can't be ruled out entirely but might have to face the coming litmus test if and when the US and NATO decide to engage Iran militarily. If they get involved there is a frightening possibility of an unthinkable hostility breaking out that nobody in their right mind should want but just might slip out of everyone's control just like the 1st WW with devastating consequences for the known world. If hoping this scenario doesn't happen then there is a chance of a multi-polar world emerging in a decade or so.

Where else to look for the necessary strength and vision to create a multipolar world? There is a popular saying 'nothing comes out of nothing'. So instead of looking in the dark it may be wise to explore the prospect of existing multinational groupings that are supposed to build trust and cooperation between nations. What about the UN? G20? OIC? BRICS? ASEAN? Sadly none of these have the ability or intent. But at least it might be worth to explore, why not. Most of the UN agencies partly under pressure and partly out of choice have buckled to US diktats. The US unilateralism has crippled the UNSC to the point of making the most potential centre of a multi-polar world impotent. It can no longer wield effective authority in crisis resolution.

Second, G20 is definitely a prospective vehicle but it has no legal authority beyond member states. But then besides the UNSC no other group of nations has got any either. It's more of an extended version of G7 without sharing a similar worldview. This diversity could perhaps create a positive scope for

developing a much needed multi-polar world provided both the opposing views represented by competing group of states are equally matched at least economically as well as militarily. G20 is still evolving; as such it's too early to predict whether it will end up like a new UNSC or grow into a collective body of powerful states to look beyond trade and financial matters. If it intends it has the capability to resolve conflicts across the world through discussion on the table. If it decides so the world might have a chance for peace and equity.

Next is the OIC. Having the largest number of members after UN and holding more than a fifth of humanity in its fold its body is no doubt huge but utterly toothless vis a vis power equation. Behind its pompous declarations it hides an acute lack of unity and a medieval worldview. OIC is trapped in a historical time wrap. Its impotence stems from part unwilling part inability to decide whether Islam is a religion or nation. This policy paralysis reduces its role at best to an adjunct of imperial power centres, at worst an embarrassing body of autocrats and tyrants totally at a loss with modernity or its core attributes that has shaped the present day world.

The emergence of BRICS in the recent past offered a huge possibility to grow as an alternative to the present G7 led world order. If China, Russia, India, Brazil and South Africa can pull its human and material resources together it has both the economic and military prowess to fit that expectation. But it's hamstrung by a deep mistrust between two of its largest members, China and India. It stems partly from tensions over contested borders and partly from rivalry over influence in South Asia and the Indian Ocean region. Moreover, with limited economic power India is naturally wary of getting involved in a planetary power game. Until such time these concerns have been addressed, BRICS won't be able to achieve its full potential.

Although earlier ASEAN was a willing partner of the US global strategy in Southeast Asia in recent times however, it is trying its best to maintain a peaceful relation with both the US and China. It neither has any potential nor intent to offer any alternative worldview. It was formed to foster better trade relation and financial regulation among the members and has remained so. Therefore it's futile to imagine ASEAN can be the focus for developing a multipolar world. But there are two other possible sources though presently at a nascent stage that may offer future potential are the Alliance of Latin American countries and the Association of African States.

Where else to look for a geopolitical association that may create a multi-polar world? Given the constraints of all the above probable forces that could have developed such a possibility it may be futile to look for one anywhere else, at least for the time being. But at the same time it will be rash to give up on the boundless human spirit. All through history this element was the key driving force that strived for a more equitable society. Let's just take one incident from the annals of world history. The early Christians were laughed at when some of them audaciously predicted that Rome will be a Christian state. Well, that's precisely what happened. Even after the biggest threat to global capitalism collapsed nearly thirty years ago the internal demons of capitalism is begetting a series of resistance across the world. Roaring for social democracy is now in the mainstream US politics albeit weak, something unlikely even a decade ago. Growing number of popular movements in Europe are exposing the hidden imperial agenda of the so called liberal democracies. Even after brutal suppression of democratic movements across the developing world agitating for accountability from autocrats/tyrants doesn't seem to go away.

All these popular aspirations are pointing to the direction of an accountable, democratic, and socialist transformation. Hitherto practiced socialism severely lacked in key fundamentals like grassroot democracy, women's rights, environmental concerns, and last but not the least is the spiritual quest. So long humans are unable to unravel the mysteries of creation the spiritual quest will be constant, so it's useless to suppress this natural instinct. Here is where the role of a multi-faith dialogue becomes important. If such transformations takes place an alternative world will be possible to contest with imperial centres, thus create a multipolar world order.

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Envisioning a multi-polar world

Robert Reid and Maxine Gay



For the month of August 1989 we attended the first People's Plan for the 21st Century gathering in Japan. PP21 was a programme of forums, exposures and actions all over Japan involving thousands of Japanese and foreign friends and ended with the adoption of the

Minamata Declaration with its call for Janakashaba; "a world standing not like this".

The world that was standing at that time was a bi-polar one with the two great powers of the Soviet Union and the United States of America facing off against each other in a cold war that had begun the day after the end of the Second World War ended.

Although the danger of a nuclear war was ever present, with both superpowers armed to the teeth with nuclear weapons, the MAD (Mutually Assured Destruction) Doctrine ensured that neither superpower "pushed the button" first. The superpower standoff, and the support of the Soviet Union (followed by China) for independence struggles, saw national liberation victories in China itself, Vietnam, and much of Africa and Asia. The period saw the development of the non-aligned movement (NAM) of (mostly) recent independent states that tried to carve out a third pole between those of the two superpowers.

Little did we know in August 1989, as we analysed the state of the world in Minamata and celebrated Asian peoples movements a few days later in Fukuoka, that the state of the world was about to change forever and a new epoch, a very different world would emerge from the end of 1989. And it is this world that we now see changing again some 30 years on.

The uni-polar world

We had just returned home from Japan when the people's movements in East and West Berlin achieved their goal with the tearing down of the Berlin Wall in November 1989. This was symbolic of a fundamental political change that was happening in one of the superpowers and its satellite states in Eastern Europe. With the accession of Mikhail Gorbachev to General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1985 and

head of state from 1988, his policies of glasnost (openness) and perestroika (restructuring) saw the breaking of the iron control that the Soviet Union had on Eastern Europe following WWII, and following his replacement by Boris Yeltsin in 1991 the break-up of the Soviet Union itself.



The collapse of the Soviet Union dramatically increased the dominance of the US as the only global superpower and the beginning of the epoch of uni-polar dominance. Francis Fukuyama declared this the natural order of things that would last forever; it was, he declared, the "end of history". But for those of us who use dialectical materialism as their method of analysis we knew it would only be a matter of time before the contradictions inherent in a uni-polar world would start to mature and new poles of power would start to emerge.

The move to a uni-polar epoch of global power was concurrent with the dominance of and export of both social liberalism and economic neo-liberalism from the US.

The results of this have been very contradictory across the globe. In South Africa, after decades of struggle of the ANC, PAC, BCM (Black Consciousness Movement), liberation was finally achieved, and "sanctioned" by the US. And although the liberation was led by the ANC with the South African Communist Party at its core, liberated South Africa was unable to follow the programme set down by these parties but was instead brought into the economic and social orbit of the US dominated uni polar world. One could tell that as his term progressed Nelson Mandela could see and was dispirited with this situation and conveniently, the BCM's Steve Biko (prior to liberation) and the SACP's Chris Hani (post liberation), two leaders with the stature and intellect to build a pro-people socialist post-apartheid society, were murdered before they were given a chance.

Without the challenge from the Soviet Union, the US changed tack from establishing and propping up reactionary and anti-communist, anti-socialist regimes around the globe to suddenly becoming the

"champion" of human rights (including women's rights and worker rights). Following the 9/11 attack on the twin towers in 2001, the US finally found a new enemy, not in the perpetrators of the attack and their variant of Islam, but in the rest of the Islamic world and was able to launch a new "hot" "war on terror".

This "war on terror" and war against Islam continues to this present day. It saw the US overthrow Saddam Hussain on the (dis-proved) pretext of his regime having "weapons of mass destruction". It saw the US "supporting", then corrupting and subverting much of the Arab Spring movement with the outcome being severely weakened North African and Arab states and an almost 8 year long civil war in Syria.

A multi-polar world

While this uni-polar world with US dominance has lasted for 30 years, the seeds of its own destruction are starting to germinate and grow; a new world order is developing in the womb of the old.

So what are the challenges to the unipolar world from which we can envision a multi polar world?

First is the growth in power of the European Union (EU). Although the EU has been in the same Western camp as the US and allowed the US to be camp leader, there are now severe stresses between these two blocs. At the moment the EU is involved in the beginning of a very public Trump initiated Trade War with the US which still has to be played out. Also it is finding a Trump led US is breaking and reneging on both the climate change and security consensus of the "trans-Atlantic alliance." The EU finds Trump supporting and urging on attempts to break up the EU through supporting Brexit and alt-right led attempts for other countries to leave the EU.

However although these latest skirmishes can be blamed on a US rogue President, the ruling class and deep state of the US have for some time been worried about the increasing economic and political power of the EU, especially since it has expanded to incorporate the nations and economies of the former Soviet aligned Eastern Europe. The biggest threat that the EU poses for the US is the prospect of the Euro challenging the US as the global trade currency. There has been only limited commentary on the fact that prior to the invasion or actual or attempted regime change by the US, Iraq, Libya and Syria had started to go down the path of denominating their oil and other trade in Euro. And that is exactly what Iran is doing at the current time. It seems that the possibility of Petro-Euros has triggered US aggression in the "middle-east" as much as oil itself.

The second challenge to US uni-polar domination is from China. China's annual GDP of \$11 trillion is fast approaching that of the US. The US has allowed and even encouraged China to become the factory of the world. But this now means that China is chalking up massive trade surpluses with the US; USD 37.5 billion in 2017. China's soft diplomacy through loans and the "belt and road project" is increasing its global reach and influence. China's less than soft diplomacy has also seen it shore up its hegemony in the South China Sea, essentially catching the US asleep. Partly from populist vote catching but also partly from concern by some in the US ruling class, Trump has now launched the beginning of a trade war against China as well as the EU.

The third challenge to the uni-polar world comes from Russia. US imperialism may have defeated Soviet socialism, but it has far from defeated Russian Nationalism. Russia has thwarted the US regime change aggression in Syria. Russia is also likely to ensure that Iran is able to stand up to US aggression. It seems that the US ruling class and deep state are split and confused as to how to deal with Russia. The attempts by Trump to get closer to Russia are not opposed by all in the US ruling class. Indeed for a while it seemed that under the Trump presidency a coherent new Axis was being built of the US, Russia, UK and Japan to contain what some in the deep state see as the biggest threats to the US; being the EU and China.

This attempt is very controversial within the US. It does not take into account the escalating tensions between Russia and the EU. It also has to deal with the best relations that China and Russia have had for decades and their security cooperation through the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (which now includes India and Pakistan) and economic cooperation through the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa). Together BRICS accounts for 26.46% of world land area, 42.58% of world population, 13.24% of World Bank voting power and 14.91% of IMF quota shares. According to IMF's estimates, BRICS countries generated 22.53% of the world GDP in 2015 and have contributed more than 50% of world economic growth during the last 10 years.

And while we see the increasing challenges to US uni-polar global hegemony, we also witness the slow "Death of Empire" from within. We know from history that the eventual decline and death of empires is not pretty and the death of the US empire will be no different. This will create an even more dangerous world than the epoch of "Pax-America"

and the US will be more aggressive and unpredictable than before. We could see more, not less, Trump-like presidents as the US declines or a slower decline could take place under more traditional (Democrat or Republican) Presidents.

Only a multi-polar global peoples' movement for a just peace will be able to defeat the war clouds that are gathering as the US empire declines and finally dies.

Other aspects of a multi- polar world

However a multi-polar world is not just about states and big power rivalries. Today, we are witnessing the development of a multi-polar world across peoples, cultures and societies as well as nations.

We see apopular reaction against a dominant or imposed social / cultural norm. This is taking place across ethnicity, religion and gender in different and often very contradictory ways.

The biggest example of this is the growth of Islam as a political and social movement as well as a religious one and the attack on Islam from the so-called Christian West. The "War on Terror" was launched by the US, not on a country but on a religion. Immigration laws in the US target this same religion. An anti-Jewish US president has no problem providing even greater support to Israel as a bulkhead against the Muslim world. However we also see positive responses to a uni-polar global religion through the assertion of the non-Christian religions and the building of a religious multi-polar world, through such things as multi-religious forums and multi-religious institutions.

The rise in ethnic polarities have also been contradictory. On one hand we have seen appalling examples of ethnic cleansing (the most recent being of the Rohingya in Myanmar). But on the other hand many indigenous people across the world continue to assert their indigenous culture and rights within nations and societies which had attempted to at worst wipe out, at best to assimilate such cultures into the dominant culture.

On gender issues, the struggle against the patriarchy continues but in a diverse, not a linear way. The struggle for women's rights continues including for democratic and human rights in Saudi Arabia and the right to be free from sexual molestation and violence in the US. In most countries the criminalisation of homosexuality has been abolished and gay marriage is becoming the "norm" in an increasing number of those countries. The binary division of gender into male and female is also breaking down in many parts of the world, bringing

us a multi-polar view of gender as well.

Even on issues of class, some of the old contradictions between workers and capitalists are maturing and new contradictions are arising. We see the huge growth in inequality producing a super-rich of 1% of the world's population that last year, according to Oxfam, seized 82% of the wealth created in the world. We see the surplus value that workers have created being stolen not just by their immediate capitalist employer but by the global managerial and governance classes who have designed systems to enrich themselves at the expense of workers and smaller capitalists.

Finally, the polarity of the "domination of nature by man" is coming to an end as we realise the earth will only survive if humankind lives in harmony with nature. Human created climate change has been a wake-up call across the globe. In our region of the Pacific we are now seeing the rising sea levels flooding islands that have been home to people for thousands of years. Cyclones are becoming more ferocious and more regular. Although some climate change deniers remain, a more ecological, multi-polar, approach is not just a nice idea but now an imperative for the survival of life on earth.

So, almost 30 years after committing to Janakashaba, committing to building "a world standing not like this" we have seen the end of the bi-polar world, the epoch of the uni-polar world and now the birth of a multi-polar world amongst nations, peoples, cultures, communities and mother earth herself. The task ahead for us is enormous, but as a Chinese philosopher and revolutionary said many decades ago; "the road may be long a torturous, but the future is bright".

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The Plight of Indian Minorities Living in Assam

The Process of Updating the 1951 National Register of Citizens (NRC)

Dr. Shahiuz Zaman Ahmed



Amidst huge controversy and long debate, following the orders of the Supreme Court, the Government of India has started updating the National Register of Citizens (NRC) of 1951 in Assam. The objective of updating the NRC is to help identify foreign nationals living in the state illegally. There has been an apprehension among civil liberty groups that the process of updating NRC may not be fair which might result in non-inclusion of the Muslim minorities and Hindu Bengalis who are often suspected as illegal citizens. The state now is gripped in the clutch of a huge crisis and political unrest.

Assam, the gateway province of India's northeast geographically consists of lowland, plains and valleys rifted in the middle by the mighty river Brahmaputra. Assam has international borders to north with Bhutan and to the southwest with Bangladesh. Assam also shares a border with other five hill states of India's north-east- Arunachal Pradesh to the north Nagaland and Manipur to the east, and Mizoram and Tripura to the south. Further, it shares a stretch of border with Bangladesh between Tripura and Meghalaya which borders Assam to its southwest. Throughout the ancient and medieval times, Assam remained a thinly populated region because of its different terrains, mostly dominated by an agriculturally related tribal population and its forest and swamps. Only some 2400 square miles of its flat alluvial plains were habitable. But with the finding of large-scale wastelands, which were beneficial for cultivation of various agricultural products as well as for habitable places, flow of human races in to Assam took place from time to time.

By the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Ahoms, the ruling dynasty of Assam became weak and was overpowered by the Burmese who also could not rule the state as they had to cede it to the British in 1826. The British government, seeing Assam a thinly populated state and also to increase crop production and revenue started encouraging poor peasants of eastern Bengal to migrate to Assam and settle down there. To this move, the British got huge response from the poor and expert peasants migrated to Assam for settlement. 85% of these migrants were Muslims. This flow of migration continued till India and Pakistan got independence in 1947. East Bengal became East Pakistan and again in 1971 East Pakistan became independent Bangladesh.

It is alleged that the poor people from Bangladesh are still migrating to Assam. Hence demand of ousting the five to seven million Bengali became an agenda of student Movement to begin with.

All Assam Students Union (AASU)

AASU launched a long six years of Bengali deportation movement. Posters were hanged all around the state with the slogans like- 'Pindhe lungi, chorar besh, bol mia Bangladesh. Miai Asom khan khale; Mia banuak kamat nolagabo, Miahath Asom eri guchi ja, etc. (wear lungi, a dress of thief; mias go back to Bangladesh. Mias are exploiting Assam; do not engage mia labours in work; mias leave Assam immediately, etc). In this movement thousands of innocent Muslim minorities were killed at places like Neilie, Chaul Khowa Chapori, etc. and innumerable houses were burnt into ashes.

AASU and Indian Government Accord

After a long debate and to restore peace and order in the state the Government of India signed an accord known as Assam Accord on 15th August 1985 with the movement leaders coming into consensus that the foreigners who came to Assam after midnight of March 24, 1971 shall be detected, and expelled in accordance with law. Also it was decided to upgrade the long pending National Register of Citizens (NRC) 1951, so that the foreigners living in Assam can be detected to take necessary action. But till 2010, the government did not take any step to upgrade the NRC. Instead, in 1997, the government created another chaotic situation marking three hundred seventy thousand inhabitants mostly Muslims in the voter list as 'D' voters (Doubtful voters or citizens) and snatched away the voting rights. Thirty two (32) Foreigners Tribunals had

been set up throughout the state to examine these large numbers of people whether they are genuine Indians or foreigners. But of 32 tribunals, 13 are lying defunct without judges. Thus the progress of tribunal work is very slow. Till date even after the publication of the final draft of the upgraded NRC of 1951, there are two hundred forty eight thousand cases of 'D' voters lying unsolved in the Foreigners' Tribunals. In the solved cases, the Tribunals could hardly identify the 'D' voters as foreigners. For example, during 2006-2010 in the foreigners' tribunal of Bongaigaon against 9,222 registered cases only 1,333 got settled and four accused had been identified as Bangladeshis. That too, those accused got such verdicts as they could not produce their documents within stipulated time given by the court. Thus the creation of 'D' voters has proved to be an organised mechanism of the government to harass the religious minority citizen of the state.

Updating NRC towards Segregation?

The Government of India had earlier not paid any attention to update the NRC in spite of strong demands from different socio political organizations of the state. All Assam Students Union (AASU), Akhil Bhartiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP), Assam Jatiyatabadi Yuva Chatra Parishad (JYCP), Assam Public Works (APW), and many others placed long series of demands to the government to update the long pending NRC of 1951. These organizations believe that the updated NRC 1951 will segregate the foreign nationals especially illegal Bangladeshis living in the state from the Indian citizens. After a long debate and with the interference of the Supreme Court, the Government of India through a notice has finally decided to update the long pending NRC.

Interestingly, the Muslims, most of whom are suspected as illegal occupants of the state welcomed the move of NRC up-gradation along with other civil society organizations. The suspected Muslims have been claiming for long that they are also legal citizens of the country and believe that the up-gradation of the NRC on the basis of legal documents will bring justice to them.

The government of India under direct supervision of the Supreme Court at the initial stage through a pilot project decided to update the NRC of Chaygaon Revenue Circle of Kamrup District and Barpeta Revenue Circle of Barpeta District in 2010 but the project failed as in the process lots of anomalies arose.

The task of NRC works again began in 1915 and the inhabitants were asked apply for inclusion of their

names in the final list of updated NRC. The final draft of the NRC was published on 30th July, 2018. The draft left out more than four million people. The ruling BJP government with few other political parties and many organizations of the state suspected poor Bengali speaking Muslims as illegal occupants of the state and believed that the updated NRC will help in identifying those large numbers of foreign nationals. But to the surprise of all, these four millions are from different places of the state and belong to different ethnic groups. Of these left out of the draft along with the Muslims a considerable number belong to the Bengali, Nepali and Koach Rajbongshi Hindu Communities. Even many other people from the tribal communities could not find birth in the list. In the left out figure, the 2.4800 'D' Voters and a few declared foreigners are there. The present mechanism in a vague way allowed the 'D' voters to apply for inclusion of their names in the updated NRC. It is assured that those "D" Voter's name will only be included in NRC after getting clearance from the Foreigners Tribunals. But the way the Foreigners' Tribunals are functioning, it will take 70 to 80 years to settle all the cases. Many of the victims will die before their cases get settled. Thus the "D" Voter's cases are expected to shatter Assam's politics for another long term.

However, it does not mean that these four million people are foreign nationals and there are no shortcomings in final draft list. During the time of application process, the Supreme Court allowed married women to submit Panchayat Certificate with Legacy Data used to prove linkages with their parents. But while the dead line of the submission of the forms was over another question mark was put to the acceptance of the Panchayat documents. These applications had to go under stringent verification process. It led to exclusion of 2.9 million out of 4.7 million women who submitted Panchayat Certificates. In the claim process to be followed most of their names are expected get enlisted in the final NRC to be published by the end of this year.

Innumerable instances befits that total members of a family could not find place in the Draft list. If parents names are there in the list, children are left out and if the children's names are their parents are missed out. Again many people have their own name in the NRC of 1951 but their names are ridiculously left out from the present draft NRC. Even surprisingly many of the renowned Muslim and Bengali Hindu politicians and civil society members like a former Chief Minister of Assam, family members of former President of India, family members of former deputy speaker of Assam

Assembly, a member of Assam Legislative Assembly family members of freedom fighter, number of armed forces personnel and so on are reportedly left out from the draft. But the stories of fear and anxiety of the poor, illiterate and economically backward sections are still remained unreported. All these anomalies can lead to much injustice.

There was a general assumption that the publication of the final draft of the NRC might create a chaotic situation in the state. The government also deployed military personnel to watch the movement of the people and declared prohibitory orders under Section 144 of CrPC in seven districts -- Barpeta, Darrang, Dima Hasao, Sonitpur, Karimganj, Golaghat and Dhubri restricting movement and assembling of people. But surprisingly, the people of the state did not show any reaction in response to the publication of the final draft list. People maintained peace and order.

People's Organizations and Political Parties Reactions over the Draft NRC:

Though the draft NRC, 2018 left out more than four million applicants, the people of Assam maintained peace and order and showed complete faith in the process. The left out people are convinced that in the next claiming process they will definitely find justice and get enlisted in the final NRC supposed to be published by the end of December 2018. But outside Assam it created a huge political debate and the issue reached the parliament. Many political leaders started making provocative comments. Opposition parties led by the TMC and the Samajwadi Party created uproar in the Rajya Sabha over the publication of NRC draft forcing adjournment of a session of the parliament. Amit Shah, the president of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) called these 4 million people "illegal intruder". Many other BJP leaders started making comments about how these people should be disposed off. Shiladitya Dev, a BJP MLA from Assam expressed dissatisfaction with the number of the left out people as he considers 90% of Muslim population living in the state is Bangladeshi.

Mamata Banerjee, the Chief Minister of West Bengal is unwilling to accept the mechanism by which millions of people are kept outside the draft list and said that Indian people have become refugees in their own country. The leaders of Indian National Congress under whose rule the process of the task of NRC was initiated are also blaming that the present government is not doing justice to the linguistic minority people of the state who are genuine Indian citizens and thereby the ruling party

is sowing seeds of communalism. A section of media houses allegedly backed by the ruling party are also adding insult to injury. Till date these mainstream news channels have been continuously misreporting the happenings declaring the left out four million people as illegal immigrants and thereby demanding deportation. Few others have been quoting conspiracy theories to explain that a particular religious or linguistic community is being targeted. These politicized statements and opinions have led to political discord in the state shattering national politics too.

BJP's Stand on Foreigners' Issue:

The Government of India led by BJP is a forerunner of Hindutva Ideology of the RSS plans to clear its stand on the foreigners' issue of the country by bringing a new Bill called 'The Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2016. The Bill, introduced in the Lok Sabha on July 15, 2016, seeks to amend the Citizenship Act, 1955 to provide citizenship to illegal migrants from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan who are of Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi or Christian extraction. The Bill doesn't have any provision to accept Muslim migrants. Even the Bill is not willing to give citizenship or shelter to the Muslim sects like Shias and Ahmediyas who face persecution in Pakistan. This bill designed in a communal line has been largely opposed in Assam. Even, BJP's coalition partner in Assam, Assam Gana Parishad has threatened to cut ties with the party if the Bill is passed.

A Note of Cautions and Optimism

In spite of all oppositions, BJP is adamant to pass the bill. This bill is a clear cut violation of a secular democratic constitution. The present updating process of Assam NRC does not distinguish migrants on the basis of religion. It will identify anyone, who has entered the State illegally after 24th March 1971, irrespective of their religions. Hence, religious prejudice is out of the question. If the Bill becomes an Act, the identified non-Muslim foreigners will get citizenship automatically leaving the declared Muslim foreigners in dark future. The adamant Central Government and all leaders of BJP are confident of converting the proposed bill in to an Act. At the same time there are signs that BJP is weakening and consensus is emerging towards broader coalition of moderates and democratic alliances towards a positive change.

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Rape as a Crime against Humanity: Making a Case for the Rohingya Women

Dr. Saira Rahman Khan



Overview

The Rohingya people have been thrust into the international spotlight for the most inhumane reasons and are probably the most persecuted group of human beings in the world today. Despite their long history in Myanmar,

today they have no nationality, no home, no security and for many, no family. Reports, statements and news have shown the world that when they were living in the Rakhain state, they were looked down upon as inferior by the Buddhist majority population and had no legal rights, citizenship, no right to practice their own religion (Islam) in peace, little or no chance at education, were deprived from proper and effective medical facilities and treatment and, as a majority, lived in the poor townships. In 1994 a law was passed where severe marriage restrictions were imposed on the Rohingya community requiring long and complicated procedures and in 2005 a law was passed that limits the birth rate among Rohingya Muslims to two children per family ¹. This is indeed selective repression. In a nut-shell: the Rohingya were, and still are, unwanted in Myanmar.

On a personal level, I had the opportunity to meet two young Burmese women who were in Portugal studying for their PhDs. When I told them that I had heard about a group of people called Rohingya and wanted to know more, one of them told me that the Rohingya were not Burmese. That they were a nuisance and were mainly thieves and criminals and a harm to society. She added that they were actually Bengali and needed to go back to Bangladesh and that they looked nothing like the Burmese. I was taken aback at the venom in her tone. Needless to say, my reply was controlled and polite - but sufficient in content to make them avoid me for the rest of our conference in a confined venue.

As a Bangladeshi, living in Bangladesh, the fact that we are host to the largest refugee camp in the world is an everyday reality. However, it is those who are working closely with and for the Rohingya refugees who are affected the most by what they see and hear, as they treat wounded, impregnated, distressed, scared and physically and mentally fragile Rohingya refugees. What these people have experience can only be described as crimes against the human race - as Crimes against Humanity.

However, it is not only the Rohingya people who fled for their lives and entered Bangladesh, that we need to think about. We also need to think about the welfare of the next generation of refugees who will be born or have been born in the camps - many to mothers who were raped by Burmese soldiers and their cohorts in crime - and about the mothers who did not ask to play such a role. They were violated as a part of a systematic move to wipe out the Rohingya population from Myanmar. Myanmar must face the International Criminal Court. It must be charged with crimes against humanity - including for rape, forced impregnation and sexual abuse.

Crimes against Humanity as defined in the Rome Statute

The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (the Rome Statute) recognises four crimes that it considers 'the most serious crimes of concern to the international community as a whole' ². These are: the crime of genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and the crime of aggression.

Article 7 of the Rome Statute defines eleven offences that are recognised as crimes against humanity. These, briefly, include murder, extermination, deportation or forcible transfer of population, torture, rape, sexual slavery, forced pregnancy or other forms of sexual violation, enforced disappearances and other inhumane acts that intentionally cause great suffering or serious injury to mental or physical health. Anyone who has been closely following the

1. Baroud, Ramzy. 'Rohingya Population Control: The Onslaught in Burma Continues', Foreign Policy Journal. 06 June 2013. www.foreignpolicyjournal.com.
2. Article 5 of the Rome Statute for the International Criminal Court.

news and reports of atrocities perpetrated on the Rohingya people, will realise that they have suffered all of these at the hands of the Myanmar Army and its supporters-in-arms.

In order for the above crimes to count as 'crimes against humanity', they (any of them) must be committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against any civilian population. The Rohingya community as a whole have come under such violence on a systematic basis due to a very specific agenda of the Myanmar government - through its laws, policies and practices of persecution and exclusion.

Not only are the Rohingya people suffering what amounts to crimes against humanity, what is being and has been done to them also amounts to the crime of genocide, as per Article 6 of the Rome Statute. Under this, Genocide is defined as acts of killing, causing serious bodily or mental harm, imposing measures to prevent births or forcibly transferring children; in order to or with the intention of destroying in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group. The Rohingya people have been continuously targeted and suppressed, killed and forced under birth control policies, denied nationality and other citizen-related rights by the Myanmar government. A very good example of what ingredients are required to create a genocide.

However, for the purpose of this paper, the focus remains on rape and forced pregnancy as crimes against humanity.

Rape as a Crime against Humanity:

The Rome Statute, in Article 7, recognises 'rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy, enforced sterilization or any form of sexual violence or comparable gravity' as crimes against humanity if such acts are part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against any

civilian population.

Given the social stigma attached to rape, there is little hope that an exact number of Rohingya females who were raped by Myanmar soldiers and/or their supporters in crime can be made. However, medical volunteers, UNICEF field workers and non government organisations working as healthcare providers are trying their best to assist as many victim-survivors as possible. UNICEF is providing healthcare to pregnant girls and women inside the camps³ but there have also been reports of attempts at self-induced abortions by those too shy or ashamed to seek proper assistance and support⁴. According to a 17 May 2018 report in the South China Morning Post⁵ an estimated 48,000 women will give birth in the camps in 2018 - many of them victims of rape in the hands of Burmese soldiers. Many of them are not yet adults - some are as young as 12. The report further states that the organisation MSF alone treated 311 rape victims between the ages of 9 and 50 between August 2017 and March 2018. Another report published by the New Straits Times quotes a report released by Reuters stating that 'around 60 babies a day are being born in vast refugee camps in Bangladesh.'⁶

'During their operations, the army entered our house, where they found my mother, wife and sister at home. They took my 18-year-old sister to nearby bushes and gang-raped her. She was brought back after the rape. She was in a critical situation and died the same day. I was in the canal fishing and upon my return I found her dead.' (a 27 year old fisherman from KyeinChaung Village).⁷

Odhikar, a human rights activist organisation of which I am a member of, is closely monitoring the human rights situation in the refugee camps and collecting testimonies from the refugees regarding their background, where they are from and the atrocities they suffered. Women in the camps tell of

3. 'UNICEF Helps Rohingya Babies Born into a Legacy of Sexual Violence'. UNICEF USA Voice. June 19, 2018.

4. 'Nine Months after Myanmar assaults, Rohingya camps ready for spate of births'. The Guardian, 01 May 2018.

5. "In Rohingya refugee camps, 48,000 women will give birth this year, nine months after Myanmar forces unleashed 'frenzy of sexual violence'" Agence France-Presse, The South China Morning Post, Thursday, 17 May 2018.

6. '60 babies a day born in Rohingya refugee camps, some to rape victims.' Reuters. New Straits Times. May 17, 2018.

7. 'Interviews with Rohingyas fleeing from Myanmar since 9 October 2016'. Flash Report, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. 03 February 2017. At pg 23.

their young daughters being dragged away by Burmese soldiers, either never to be seen again or to be found abandoned in fields, dead with their clothes in disarray. They tell of the horrors of being gang raped by the soldiers, of their children forced to be witness to their rape. They tell of the other physical injuries they suffered - stabs, bodily wounds, burns. Even girls below the age of 12 were not spared by these demons ⁸.

The 03 February 2017 the Office of the High Commission for Human Rights released a flash report following their mission to Bangladesh and their visit to the refugee camps. The report contains interviews from Rohingya refugees who fled Myanmar in October 2016 and after. 52% of the 101 women interviewed by the mission reported surviving rape or other forms of sexual violence. The women identified the perpetrators as soldiers, in uniform. The report adds that a majority of the survivors interviewed were raped by more than one soldier/rapist. They were victims of gang or multiple rape. Pregnant women were not spared ⁹.

"Soldiers too me and my four children and other young women to a house in the village. I saw many bodies of women and children inside the house. The floor of the house was covered in bloodstains. The soldiers raped me there. They also hit four of my children with rifle butts and smashed their heads. Three of them died. Soldiers also hit me in the head and set fire to that house. My 10 year old daughter and I managed to escape the flames."(Dildar Begum, Rohingya Refugee from Tulatuli Village) ¹⁰.

Rape. The ultimate tool to destroy a population, by forcing women to conceive children that will be different. The deliberate means to dilute the ethnicity of a particular group of people. The means to demean a class, by ripping its women of their dignity, security and life. In countries that have suffered the horrors of 'ethnic cleansing', rape of women is a common incident - be it during the Bosnian war, the war in Rwanda or in Sri Lanka. In Bangladesh there are also many reports of women being raped and confined in sexual slavery by the Pakistani Army during Bangladesh's War for Liberation in 1971. History is rife with incidents of

plunder and rape in times of conflict - both external and in within a state.

Incidents of rape and gang rape by men who have been identified as soldiers of the Myanmar Army, have been reported by several international organisations carrying out fact finding missions in the refugee camps of Cox's Bazaar. Evidence has been found by the medical services and camps set up for the welfare of the female refugees. Evidence has been found by interviewing male refugees. Women in South Asia - especially from conservative communities where rape is a taboo issue - will not voluntarily lie about being raped, let alone being gang-raped.

Rape is a Crime against Humanity. Along with the evidence gathered regarding incidents of causing deaths due to burning, shooting, stabbing, killing of children, enforced disappearance, physical and psychological torture, ethnic and religious discrimination, destruction of food and food sources, arbitrary arrest and detention and other violations to human rights perpetrated on the people of the Rohingya community, it is high time the Security Council took stringent measures against Myanmar and referred it to investigation by the International Criminal Court. Human rights are universal and do not come with a particular religion, gender or class. Myanmar needs to be taken to task now for crimes against humanity and acts of genocide perpetrated against the Rohingya population and must pay appropriate compensation for all the harm and loss incurred by the latter - including for the crime of rape and other offences of a sexual nature.

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8. See www.odhikar.org for fact finding reports on Rohingya refugees.

9. 'Interviews with Rohingyas Fleeing from Myanmar since 9 October 2016'. Flash Report, 03 February 2017. Report of OHCHR mission to Bangladesh. Pg 20-24. See also 'Gang raped and set on Fire: ICC pushes to investigate Myanmar Rohingya atrocities' The Guardian International Edition, 23 June 2018.

10. 'Fact finding Mission Report on the Rohingya'. ODHAKAR. 12 June 2018. www.odhikar.org. at page 20.

Rohingya Genocide Must End

Ishak Mia Sohel



It is believed that two-thirds of Myanmar's Rohingya population has been forced to leave the country over the last five years, the majority of whom are taking shelter in an extremely limited

space in Bangladesh's coastal district of Cox's Bazar. They are still arriving every day - sick, hungry and exhausted.

Despite the magnitude of the Rohingya crisis and the subsequent exodus, the global outrage and response to their misery has been far too slow and insignificant, compared with the outpouring in the horrifying terrorist attacks in Brussels and Paris. It is partly because the Myanmar authorities' attempt to conceal the evidence by imposing a blockade on Rakhine, making it inaccessible to journalists, international monitors and human rights investigators. Hence, the genocide that is unfolding in Rakhine largely remains obscure to outsiders.

None of us, even those living in neighbouring countries to Myanmar, have a clear idea how many people have been killed and how many women have been raped and sexually assaulted over the past two months. A latest survey carried out by Medecins Sans Frontieres (Doctors Without Borders) found that at least 9,000 Rohingya died in Myanmar due to violence, including at least 730 children under the age of 5, between Aug 25 and Sept 24 last year.

The latest drone footage depicting thousands of desperate new Rohingya refugees fleeing Rakhine into Bangladesh is heartbreaking. It clearly shows the suffering of those targeted in crimes against humanity in Myanmar. However, this is not the first time that the Rohingya are fleeing their home across the border into Bangladesh.

In 1978, more than 200,000 Rohingya fled to Bangladesh when the Myanmar government launched an operation under the code name "Naga Min" (Dragon King) to expel the scapegoated illegal immigrants from its territory. The operation targeted

the Rohingya Muslims through killing, widespread rape, looting, forced labour, arbitrary arrest and burning homes and religious sites.

Again in 1991 and 1992, nearly a quarter of a million Rohingya took shelter in Bangladesh, following a dramatic increase of forced labour, torture, rape and summary executions committed by both the Myanmar military and local Rakhine Buddhists. Between October 2016 and February last year, around 74,000 Rohingya refugees entered Bangladesh after the Myanmar army launched a crackdown, according to International Organisation for Migration's estimates. The ultimate purpose of these heinous crimes against Rohingya was to make them invisible in their motherland.

Although the Rohingya have been living in Myanmar since the 8th century, they are discriminated as illegal immigrants from Bangladesh by the Myanmar government, which subsequently used this as a pretext to deny them citizenship for decades. It is an unfortunate fact that the local Rakhine Buddhist population is deeply misled by their military and government into considering the Rohingya a threat and treating them with hostility.

There is, in fact, well-documented evidence that Rohingya were once legitimate citizens of the Union of Burma under Article 3 of the Aung San-Attle Treaty (1947) and the First Schedule to the Burma Independence Act in 1947. They even had their own political parties and representation in Parliament, cabinet and peoples' councils of different levels during the democratic period from 1948 to 1962. But in 1982, 20 years after the coup d'état, General Ne Win's military regime redefined the citizenship law that made the Rohingya effectively stateless.

The question is, what role does the international community play in stopping the systematic repression of the Rohingya and the ongoing final stage of genocide?

The simple answer is, none! In the past, the United States, the European Union and others have remained silent, letting the military regime do what

they want. Now, they close their eyes to the mass annihilation of Rohingya with the excuse that any intervention may put Myanmar's young democracy at risk.

With the exception of Malaysia, ASEAN continues to play no role in the Rohingya crisis. The 31st ASEAN Summit in the Philippines on Nov 10 to 14 last year avoided discussing the deadly exodus of Rohingya from Myanmar. Even the words "Rohingya" or "Rohingya suffering" were not mentioned in the summit draft statement.

Many human rights activists, lawyers, academics and scholars use the term "genocide" to describe the brutal ethnic cleansing of the Rohingya. The Rome-based Permanent People's Tribunal consisting of seven judges, with strong professional judicial and academic backgrounds, found Myanmar guilty of the crime of genocide against the Rohingya after hearings took place in Kuala Lumpur from Sept 18 to 22 last year.

It is surely the right time to apply international pressure on Aung San Suu Kyi's regime to ensure

recognition and restoration of the rights to the Rohingya. Analysts say the international community will not intervene now because they are afraid of losing their possible investment in Myanmar's oil and gas sectors.

There is only one recourse: to raise global awareness of the citizenship rights and basic human rights of the Rohingya. This may influence the international community, especially the US and EU, to put an end to the Rohingya crisis.

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The official text of Canadian Parliament (endorsed by the Gov) declaring Myanmar atrocities against Rohingya GENOCIDE

On 20th September 2018 Andrew Leslie, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, introduced a motion in the House of Commons that passed with unanimous consent to recognize that the crimes against the Rohingya people constitute genocide.

Unanimous consent motion on the Rohingya

Passed in the House of Commons 20 September 2018

That the House:

- (a) endorse the findings of the UN Fact Finding Mission on Myanmar that crimes against humanity have been committed by the Myanmar military against the Rohingya and other ethnic minorities and that these horrific acts were sanctioned at the highest levels of the Myanmar military chain of command;
- (b) recognize that these crimes against the Rohingya constitute genocide;
- (c) welcome the recent decision of the International Criminal Court that it has jurisdiction over the forced deportation of members of the Rohingya people from Myanmar to Bangladesh;
- (d) call on the UN Security Council to refer the situation in Myanmar to the International Criminal Court; and
- (e) call for the senior officials in the Myanmar military chain of command to be investigated and prosecuted for the crime of genocide.

Demonization of Russia in a new Cold War era

Mairead Maguire



In examining the future, we must look to the past.

As we watch the media today, we are spoon fed more and more propaganda and fear of the unknown, that we should be afraid of the unknown and have full faith that our

government is keeping us safe from the unknown. But by looking at media today, those of us who are old enough will be reminded of the era of Cold War news articles, hysteria of how the Russians would invade and how we should duck and cover under tables in our kitchens for the ensuing nuclear war. Under this mass hysteria all Western governments were convinced that we should join Western allies to fight the unknown evil that lies to the east. Later through my travels in Russia during the height of the Cold War with a peace delegation, we were shocked by the poverty of the country and questioned how we ever were led to believe that Russia was a force to be afraid of. We talked to the Russian students who were dismayed by their absolute poverty and showed anger against NATO for leading their country into an arms race that they could not win. Many years later, when speaking to a young Americans in the US, I was in disbelief about the fear the students had of Russia and their talk of invasion. This is a good example of how the unknown can cause a deep rooted paranoia when manipulated by the right powers.

All military is expensive, and we can see in Europe that the countries are reluctant to expand their military spending and find it hard to justify this to their people. In looking at this scenario, we can ask ourselves what is beneficial about this hysteria and fear caused on both sides. All armies must have an enemy to deem them necessary. An enemy must be created, and the people must be convinced that there is need for action to safeguard the freedom of their country. Right now, we can see a shifting of financial power from old Western powers to the rise of the Middle East and Asia. Do we honestly believe that the Western allies are going to give up their power? My suggestion is: not easily. The old dying

empires will fight tooth and nail to protect their financial interests such as the petrol dollar and the many benefits that come through their power over poverty-stricken countries.

Firstly, I must say, that I personally believe that Russia is not by any means without faults. But the amount of anti-Russian propaganda in our media today is a throwback to the Cold War era. We must ask the question: Is this leading to more arms, a bigger NATO? Possibly to challenge large powers in the Middle East and Asia, as we see the US approaching the South China seas and NATO Naval games taking place in the Black Sea. Missile compounds are being erected in Romania, Poland and other ex-Soviet countries, while military games are set up in Scandinavia close to the Russian border to practice for a cold climate war scenario. At the same time, we see the US President arriving in Europe asking for increased military spending. At the same time the USA has increased its budget by 300 billion in one year.

The demonization of Russia is, I believe, one of the most dangerous things that is happening in our world today. The scapegoating of Russia is an inexcusable game that the West is indulging in. It is time for political leaders and each individual to move us back from the brink of catastrophe to begin to build relationships with our Russian brothers and sisters. Too long has the elite finically gained from war while millions are moved into poverty and desperation. The people of the world have been subjected to war propaganda based on lies and misinformation and we have seen the results of invasions and occupations by NATO disguised as "humanitarian intervention" and "right to protect". NATO has destroyed the lives of millions of people and purposely devastated their lands, causing the exodus of millions of refugees. The people around the world must not be misled yet again. I personally believe that the US, the UK and France are the most military minded countries, whose inability to use their imagination and creativity to solve conflict through dialogue and negotiation is astonishing to myself and many people. In a highly militarized, dangerous world it is important we start to humanize each other and find ways of cooperation and build fraternity amongst the nations. The policies of

demonization of political leaders as a means of preparing the way for invasions and wars must be stopped immediately and serious effort put in to the building of relationships across the world. The isolation and marginalization of countries will only lead to extremism, fundamentalism and violence.

During our visit to Moscow we had the pleasure of attending a celebration of mass at the main Orthodox Cathedral. I was very inspired by the deep spirituality and faith of the people as they sang the entire three-hour mass. I was moved by the culture of the Russian people and I could feel that their tremendous history of suffering and persecution gave them sensitivity and passion for peace. Surely it is time that we in Europe refuse to be put in a position where we are forced to choose between our Russian and American brothers and sisters. The enormous problems that we are faced with such as,

due to climate change and wars, mass migration and movement of peoples around the world, need to be tackled as a world community. The lifting of sanctions against Russia and the setting up of programs of cooperation will help build friendships amongst the nations.

I call on all people to encourage their political leaders in the US, EU and Russia to show vision and political leadership and use their skills to build trust and work for peace and nonviolence.

Source: The peace PEOPLE - Working for nonviolence since 1976

www.peacepeople.com/demonization-of-russia-in-a-new-cold-war-era-by-mairead-maguire-nobel-peace-laureate/

MAIREAD MAGUIRE is a Nobel Peace Laureate.

The World is Changing

By Abdus Sabur

We play games
We win and lose

We discover strength
And weakness

We play with words
We express ourselves

Sometimes from the heart
Sometimes from the head

We urge for change
But we do not change ourselves

That is painful
That hurts our comfort
Hurts our status quo
We are professionals

We are speakers
And advocates

Who preach to others
Not meaning to practice
That is how the world is changing

A Child in Gaza

By Mohiuddin Ahmad



When I heard of Jerusalem
I was in the school in grade one
I haven't seen the city
We lived in a small town
There was no bird and tree
No river and see-through water
To find a stream
I've been waiting for thousand days

It was a cool winter morning
We were at war
Smell of gunpowder around
All were running for shelter

I was running and running
I crossed a field and orchard
I crossed a dirty drain
I walked through knee-deep garbage
I reached a barren field

In the field there was a tank
A blue-white flag with a star
It threw fire on my face
There were butchers with gun

Then a small shell hit my chest
And my blood soaked the land
Brown soil turned red with my life
A plant will sprout there someday
Its flowers will pull a butterfly
And it will bring peace for my friends

The AMANA magazine was initiated in 2005 following suggestions made at the first round of the Asian Muslim Action Network (AMAN) 'Peace Studies & Conflict Transformation' course. In Arabic, Amana means trust and embodies the primary objective of the publication in highlighting peace initiatives, peace collaboration, progressive Muslim action and inter-faith cooperation and understanding. To ensure a wide distribution range and to connect with grass-roots communities, AMANA is printed in English, Bahasa Indonesia and Thai.

AMAN supports holistic development through awareness building with an overall aim of mobilizing and sharing resources in order to help marginalized groups in Asia. AMAN aim to build understanding and solidarity among Muslims and other faith communities towards people's empowerment, human rights, justice and peace. With over 1500 members, the network of AMAN spans Asia and is coordinated from Bangkok, Thailand.

E-mail : aman.int1990@gmail.com

Focus : Islam and peace; inter-faith partnerships; development initiatives; human rights; gender and peace.

