From the Selected Works of Mr. Shams uz Zaman

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ME cauldron & risk of nuclear war (Pakistan Observer)

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Historical and contemporary strategic importance of Middle East is indisputable. Not only it is known to the birth place of Abrahamic religions but its rich natural resource potentials make it an extremely attractive region for the global powers. Unfortunately, at the political level, Middle East carries a stigma of decades’ long dictatorships and autocratic rule which emanated from the yoke of colonial imperialism. These dictatorships not only suppressed the liberal voices but genuine pan-Islamic sentiments as well with a defecto endorsement from the Western governments. Consequently, the general masses who actually never approved of the dictatorships perceived these to be an extension of Western rule which were never in conformity with their religious and modern socio-cultural traditions. Arab Spring has changed that all and now West confronts with a new reality which it is finding difficult to comprehend. The initial thrust of the Arab Spring went well with the West which viewed it as a sweeping change towards a “Western” form of Modern Liberal Democracy, ignoring the reality that religion is deeply embedded within most of the liberal but Muslim minds. The western connotation of ‘liberal’ is profoundly different from that of Muslims’ understanding. Most liberals, if Muslims would not compromise on fundamental principles of religion even if they don’t show up for violent protests, which is not the case in West. Consequently, a false impression was created in the west, considering newly emerged governments a continuity of the older regimes. The level of rage displayed by the people especially in Libya, Sudan and Egypt as a reaction to a persistent abusive campaign against Muslims and comparatively mild reaction by the governments to use force therefore becomes comprehensible.

Middle East is already on fire. Palestinian issue laid the foundations of the global terrorism, the sweeping change coined as “Arab Spring” has reached Syria with plausible scenario of engulfing Amman and Riyadh in future, Iran-Israel nuclear confrontation is soaring by each passing day, the Shiite-Sunni schism has brawled Iran and Saudi Arabia into a bitter diplomatic row and worst of all, this blasphemy issue has adding fuel to the already raging fire.

All these issues coupled with deliberate efforts to spread hate through the “freedom of abuse” hold strong prospects of situation slipping out of control or even exploding into a full scale war. Pakistanis could look into the glimpses what their own “spring” might look like once protesters attacked police and tore apart the barricades across the country. Jeffery Steinberg and Michel Chossudovsky have already warned that US hegemonic designs could trigger a chain of uncontrollable events resulting in a cataclysmic event or a nuclear war. This possibility although presently appears less probable but holds a possibility to come true. Responding to an Israeli strike, Iran might hit Dimona which would immediately acquire a nuclear dimension thus pulling major powers to jump in the fry.

Under these dim scenarios, Muslim rage appears to be reaching the threshold of the ‘Clash of Civilizations’. Ongoing protests in Muslim world as a reaction to the deliberate display of the “freedom of abuse” should come as a warning sign to all the peace loving humans. The hypocrisy of this freedom in the West becomes obvious once hijab, minarets and circumcisions are banned but tattoos and hats remains permissible, Muslim’s holy personality and book is being desecrated but debate on holocaust remains a cognizable offence. Amid this turmoil, the French magazine Charlie Hebdo provocatively added more fuel to the fire by repeating the act. Some sane minds like Sarah Chayes of Los Angeles Times have pointed out that ‘freedom of speech’ is just not about saying anything without considering its consequences. If the cost of freedom of speech is a nuclear war then abusers like Terry Jones, Nakoula Basseley, Stephane Charbonnier and Sam Bacile should be sent to Mars so that the rest of the world could live in peace.

— The writer is an MPhil scholar at NDU.