



Breaking the Cycle of Discord and Suspicion

Barack Obama in his historic speech in Cairo, made a very promising start to a challenging and arduous journey. The journey has been rendered harder by commissions and omissions of his predecessors.

Though some sceptics have already expressed disappointment on both sides, Obama himself ought to be aware of the obstacles to be overcome, which itself calls for a cautious start. He has to prove his words with meaningful action so that the whole Muslim world would continue to have faith in his words which so far have been well received.

Most important, as I see the situation, is for the US president as well as the other interested parties to accept the ground realities which so far seem to have been ignored. There had been a sad tendency on the part of the big powers to recognise them selectively.

While perhaps over-emphasising the right of Israel to exist in the midst of an Arab world, the big powers, and the US in particular, have closed their eyes to the reality of a nuclear arsenal in their favourite free land. Even the watch-dog supposed to rid the world of its nuclear weaponry seems to ignore that. Only one poor soul, an innocent Israeli by the name of Modercal Vanunu has risked jail to expose it to the world. This man who suffered in an Israel jail for 18 years for his sin, is now a non-person even to the IEA and its head. Whether the US did assist Israel in its effort to build its nuclear potential or not, it has been complicit in keeping the fact away from attention. One cannot also deny the fact, the US has been the mainstay behind Israel's strength, economically and militarily.

This also makes it imperative that the US takes responsibility for bringing Israel into the real peace process. For Middle East peace to be a reality two states of Israel and Palestine have to co-exist not as rivals but as states respecting one another's sovereignty at the least. Whether they ultimately become friendly neighbours will take a long long time to determine.

Even the most recent statement accepting a Palestine state made by the new Israel PM had a pre condition which may not easily be met. An independent Palestine state without an army? Doesn't it sound as if Israel is looking for a vassal state, an independent land occupied and ruled by Muslims?

This statement becomes a threat when it comes from a country with not only its army but with its own nuclear arsenal. Will Obama be able to drive into the heads of Israeli politicians the reality on the ground; ie that thousands and thousands of Palestinians driven away from the land they occupied and cultivated for centuries are still either prisoners in the land they once occupied or refugees in their own land and neighbouring countries.

No one will change the picture for all of them to go back to their own lands. But they must be recognised as innocent citizens and human beings suffering for no fault of theirs; their dignity as human beings must be restored and protected. In order to bring about this change a lot has to be done by Israel. Whether they make all the sacrifices they have to, or not, at least the promised stopping of extending Jewish settlements has to be honoured.

It is one of the sticking points on which Obama is facing stiff opposition from the Jews both within and without Israel. Jews in the US in particular must be ready to accept that they have treated Israel as an over-indulged child who wants to have his own way too often. If anyone can change this attitude, it is the new US president Barack Obama who has made a sincere effort to solve the problem.

World leaders should also accept another reality, that starting after 9/11 much of what Al Qaeda has done and are still doing, had their origin in the Middle East. Long before the US funded and fostered the Taliban to fight its own enemy in Afghanistan, it has had its machinations in Iran from the days its elected PM Mossdeq was toppled with US assistance. Then came its own puppet the Shah whose pyrrhic victory brought about the Iranian revolution with Ayatollah Khomeini in power. The hatred Iranian rulers have developed towards the US, has ironically been generated by the US itself.

If the new presidential election was looked forward to as a water-shed in Iranian politics the west world ultimately be disappointed. Even if, against all predictions the Supreme Leader were to change the already declared results the west will not see a dramatic change in relations in the region, for Iraq and Iran are likely to co-operate with each other eventually, now that Iraq is not governed by its Sunni minority.

As Obama has not adopted a confrontational approach

to Iran, he is on a very good wicket right now, to negotiate with that country without giving in to Israeli pressure, so that a change of heart may be brought about in Iranian leaders too, accepting Israel as a reality that cannot be erased from the map. This overall acceptance of Israel as a self-respecting neighbour by all surrounding countries will be important for peace in the region and the world.

Afghanistan will not be an easy operation. Whether it will be another Vietnam is yet to be seen. But the struggle against Taliban will be long and hard mainly due to the mysterious landscape in which the war is taking place. American effort in win-



ning the hearts of the people will hopefully play a crucial role in the success of the Afghan war.

Although most countries including Australia are worried about North Korea, it is not going to threaten the peace of the world. One has to wait and see how far its mysterious leader will proceed with his sabre-rattling pastime His game will, of course, be intended to suit the response and reaction of Western powers. Whoever is better in mind-reading is likely to come out the winners. It is going to be an interesting spectacle to watch.

The main thrust of the peace process that Barack Obama has set in motion and hopefully bring to a successful conclusion, will have to be centred round the Israel - Palestine issue.

The new US president having made history by becoming the most powerful Black Man in the world elected to office by a overwhelming majority of White US voters, has before him a grand challenge and a supreme opportunity of becoming the first US president to bring about meaningful and lasting peace between the Christian and Muslim worlds.

Whether one agrees with Huntington's theory of a clash of civilisations or not, the world has seen the differences and conflicts the followers of the two main religions in the world going on in various forms.

There may never come a situation in which both sides agree on everything political. But if the two parties can be brought together to a position in which they agree to respect each other for what they are and resolve their differences in a spirit of give and take and mutual respect without sacrificing human lives on either side; if they agree to conduct themselves always preserving human dignity with the common objective of preserving the unity and dignity of mankind, that would be a result the world will thank Obama for.

