



HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS of people have been pouring onto the streets of Pakistani cities during the first weeks of the war in Iraq. Impotent anger finds expression in burning effigies of Bush and Blair, and ineffectual attempts to boycott products like Coke and KFC

One might have expected that, by now, America's war would have been declared by Pakistan's religious leaders as a war between Islam and *kufri* (unbelievers). Our bearded ones generally lose little time in declaring holy wars. And since Bush is an evangelical Christian and uses its vocabulary unsparingly, Pakistani Muslims must perceive the war on terror as an American-Christian jihad against Islam. Right?

Pakistanis have been touched by the millions protesting in the west

Astonishingly, it has not been this way. In most protests, the humanitarian and universalistic aspect has dominated the religious. Slogans, banners, and speeches follow, for the most part, what one finds elsewhere in the world—"No Blood For Oil," "Bush-Blair Crimes Against Humanity." Some are explicitly Islamic in character and call for jihad, blame Jews and Christians, and so forth. But these are far fewer than expected.

The reason is not difficult to fathom. Pakistanis have been fascinated and touched by the tens of millions who protested in London, Washington, Rome, and other cities around the globe. They see France taking on the US in the Security Council, the Pope condemning the war as a sin, Rachel Corrie standing in the way of an Israeli bulldozer and being crushed to death, thousands courting arrest in the US, and more.

I did not think that these overseas protests would have much impact on our mullahs. After all, Pakistanis are born into xenophobia, taught to believe that they are surrounded by enemies, and subjected to poisonous textbooks in schools. I am pleased to have been mistaken. I am even more pleased that there has been no

repeat of attacks on Christians in Pakistan. In previous months, anti-US feeling following the arrest of al Qaeda members has sometimes translated into murders of Christians.

But this salutary impact of the war, although encouraging, is incidental. There are larger implications to follow for politics in Pakistan. One can, even now, clearly spot the losers and winners. Among the former are ex-prime ministers Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif, both currently exiled, and hoping that Washington will somehow restore their power and loot. But, because of their failure to forthrightly condemn the war, they are marginalised in Pakistan.

The real gainer from the Iraq war will be Pakistan's alliance of fundamentalist parties, the MMA. The MMA has come out, as expected, with a denunciation of the US and the demand that General Musharraf's government suspend its cooperation with the US in hunting down al Qaeda. The MMA is the only political party that has been able to mobilise huge numbers of people. But, for the moment, an unspecified combination of carrots and sticks seems to have persuaded them from pushing through a resolution in the National Assembly condemning the US invasion.

The MMA, which has successfully formed the government in two of Pakistan's four provinces, is angling to get into the federal government as well by trying to cultivate a moderate image. However, it is firmly committed to the Talebanisation of Pakistan. Almost immediately upon assuming office in the provinces it governs, the MMA ordered a ban on the playing of music in public transport, required buses to stop dead at the time of the five daily prayers, and closed down video shops and cinemas.

More lies in store. New laws, expected to be passed by the Frontier Assembly soon, will follow those of Afghanistan's former Taleban government. For example, women without hijab and a chaperone may not leave their homes; shops shall not advertise sale of sanitary pads; use of makeup will be banned; male doctors may not treat

Thanks to the anti-war action in the west the protests in Pakistan are surprisingly unsectarian. But the beneficiaries from the crisis will still be the radical Islamists

BY PERVEZ HOODBHOY

women patients; coeducation has been identified as a cause of fornication and is to be phased out; family planning shall be declared un-Islamic.

Musharraf, caught between popular sentiment against the Iraq war and his regime's heavy dependence on America, walks his usual tightrope. Two months ago, in a characteristically thoughtless statement, Musharraf declared that Pakistan could very well be the next on the US hit-list. But he has refused to take a strong stand on the Iraq war. And it seems fairly certain that if Pakistan had been forced to vote on a UN resolution for war, it would have abstained.

The growing support for the MMA and the rise of anti-Americanism makes it evident that the US cannot afford representative democracy in most Islamic states. It is hard to imagine any popularly elected government in Pakistan, Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Iran, or Saudi Arabia being acceptable to the US.

The cost of America's messianic mission to change the world will go well beyond the expense of maintaining 1m soldiers on five continents. One cost is immediately apparent here in Pakistan. Most Americans have fled in spite of the fact that the Pakistani government is allied with the US. The few who remain hide their presence. I am sorry about this—that I cannot invite my American friends and physicist colleagues to my country again. Many of them have opposed the war. But it is unclear if and when their security can be guaranteed. ■



"Ustinof, don't end your name in a preposition"