

FALL OF COMMUNISM IN EASTERN EUROPE

SOME REFLECTIONS

The Dawn

29 January 1990

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Eastern Europe is in the grip of a revolution, the Glasnost and Perestroika began in Soviet Russia as an instrument of reform in communism. While Russia is also undergoing far-reaching changes from within, the impact of these developments on Eastern Europe is for fundamental changes, the politico-economic map of Eastern Europe has changed during the last two months. This change has very important ideological and strategically significance, I shall try to sum up my reflections under three heads:

- What is the nature of the change?
- What factors have contributed towards this revolutionary change? And finally.
- What lessons deserve to be drawn for the muslim world?

THE NATURE OF CHANGE

While movement in Eastern Europe began primarily as search for freedom and quest for economic security and growth, it very soon turned into a revolt against communism and all that it has given to Eastern Europe during 40 years of its hegemony. People of Eastern Europe have been staging uprising against communism from time to time, starting mainly from East German uprising in 1953 followed by the historic movement of 1956 in Hungary under the leadership of Imry Natch and the Prague Spring of 1968, to mention only some of the major revolts. All these efforts were suppressed by brute forces. In 1968 the whole repressive strategy was cast into Breznev doctrine affirming that a country once comes under the influence of socialism would never be allowed to abdicate socialism and seek freedom.

The present revolution in East Europe is-to be seen in this context. It is very significant that it is characterized not merely by a wave for freedom and quest for human rights, but also revolt against communism and its principles of class struggle, nationalization of means of production, dictatorship of the proletariat, historic role of the communist party and oneness of the communist world. It is not merely the communist regimes that have been over-thrown but very principle of leading role of the communist party has been dis-owned. A number of countries have openly disowned the communist legacy and changed the names of state to simple republics, So much so that even a couple of communist parties have tried to metamorphosis themselves by clanging into social democratic parties. The principle of private property and the means of production has been re-introduced, joint ventures with foreign capital are being assiduously pursued, multi-party system has been introduced, the principle of class struggle and the historical process on which communism was based has been reversed. The development in East Europe clearly show that communism has failed as an ideology and as a socio-economic system and regard this failure as

part of the failure of the Western civilization whose different ideologies and socio-economic systems are crumbling one by one.

FACTORS RESPONSIBLE FOR FAILURE OF COMMUNISM

In my view the situation Eastern Europe is the product of a number of factors. The most important of which being the inherent weaknesses and contradictions of communism. Communism is primarily a socio-economic system based on the alleged Marxists law of historical materialism. The last 70 years during which the communist system has been experimented in Russia, China and Eastern Europe have clearly shown that the linear historical development visualized by Marxists has been frustrated by history. The system has failed to show any superiority over the earlier systems which it had challenged and replaced. It has been unable to resolve the basic problems of human society. It's assumptions about human nature, human motivation, role of religion, critical contribution of economic factors in the socio-political system of an age, its economic programmes of socialization of resources and establishment of a planned command economy, all have failed in practice. The problem faced by the communist society is not that of reform from within but of a total overhaul not only of the structure of society but also a review of the promises on which the whole ideology and social system was based. Human nature has failed to stay jacketed into the steel grooves, the communism had forged. Visit, of Gorbachev to Vatican's and his contention that man does not live by the material resources alone and the crisis of contemporary world has a moral and spiritual dimension is an apitath on the Marxists philosophy of communism. The role of religion in whole of Eastern Europe in general and in Poland, Checkoslovakia and Hungary in particular should be an eye-opener to all historians of communism. I therefore believe that the first major factor responsible in the situation relates to the internal dynamics of the communist system and its incapability to face the civilisational challenge of our age.

The economic, political and social structures of communism are closely inter-related. Nationalization of production resources demand a political system where freedom is curtailed and economic and political dictatorship is established. In fact nationalization of means of production cannot become operational without nationalization of ideas and thoughts of the people. This produced a most repressive regime under communism in Russia and Eastern Europe. Initially it was for economic reasons that some kind of privatization began private ownership of means of consumption and of limited means of production began. Private ownership of wealth and private investments began to be recognized. Profit motives, however, limited were re-introduced. Interests and law of inheritance were also rehabilitated. Movement towards maximum economy gained momentum. These changes in the economy could not fully-bear fruit without realization of the repressive machinery and greater political freedom. Glasnost was a natural need of the system. Once Glasnost began it led to far-reaching changes in academic, literary, cultural and political fields. I can therefore see a role tor economic reform introduced during the last 20 years in what is currently taking place in Eastern Europe and the rest of the communist world.

LESSONS TO BE DRAWN FOR THE MUSLIM WORLD

I regard Helsinki agreement of 1972 as an important mile-stone in East Europe marching away from communism and from Russian domination. The principle on which the Helsinki Basket was formulated affirmed the human rights of individual and freedom of exchange of information and contact between the people of the world the communism has prospered by encasing people behind the iron walls. Once these walls began to crumble and there were more contacts with the rest of the world greater exchange of information, exposure to the ideas and achievements with the rest of the world it was difficult for communist society to hold to its own. This process was accelerated by a revolution in the technology of communication and information during the last two decades. This facilitated the contacts between peoples who were separated by artificial walls in the past. This also exposed the failure of communism and the plight of the people who were forced to seek their destiny in communism. The change began to crumble, what is taking place in Eastern Europe is a result of this historic process.

The political collapse of the Russian strategy in Afghanistan and the successes of the Mujahideen in throwing back the Russian forces of occupation from their homeland have also played a very important role in bringing about the changes that are now taking place in whole of the communist world, particularly Eastern Europe. It was the fear of the Russian war machines that kept communist, world together for long. The failure of Russia in Afghanistan struck a mortal blow to Soviet prestige a super-power capability of holding others under sway by military bite. The withdrawal of Russian forces from Afghanistan represents the beginning of the end of the Soviet empire. Countries of East Europe realized very soon that now is the time to seek freedom from Russian hegemony. The international situation was such that the fear of Russian intervention in East Europe was minimal. As such the Jihad in Afghanistan has set- the pace for historic developments in whole of the Eastern hemisphere and what is happening is only a beginning. Fundamental changes would take place in Soviet Russia particularly in the Baltic region, Georgia and Muslim Central Asia.

In my view these are some of the major factors responsible for this change. While Mr. Gorbachev has played an important role in this process, he himself is a product of the forces responsible for change and not the sole architect of this process. The current leadership of Russia, it seems, has realized the historical forces that could not be resisted and has tried to harmonies its attitude and policies with them even where it meant bending back from communism. This streak of realism in their approach deserves to be appreciated. This has also made the transition less painful, although the full cost of the change is yet to be calculated.

LESSONS FOR THE FUTURE

Looking to the future, while the failure of communism has become more and more manifest it would be too unrealistic to assume that communism is going to disappear from the face of the

earth very soon. The communist world is in crisis and is heading towards dis-integration. The process of crisis and dis-integration may last for decades, all one learns from history that civilizations do not necessarily collapse with a bang; they take long periods of dis-integration and decay before they finally collapse and disappear. Roman Empire is one such example whose period of disintegration is spread over centuries.

This crisis has also to be seen in the context of the crisis of Western civilization as such. It is my considered opinion that those who are trying to project the failure of communism as a victory for a liberal opportunity of capitalism and secular democracy are mistaken. The crisis of liberalism and secular democracy is also very much there; only presently it has been somewhat different and has been over-shadowed by the more severe crisis of communism. The coming years are going to be critical for mankind. There is a spiritual and moral vacuum. World liberalization and secular democracy can provide a model to the Eastern Europe, but they would not be able to solve the fundamental problems of individual family and society, as they have not been able to do so in their own main land of Europe and Americas. As such the crisis cannot be seen as failure for one and the victory of the other, that would be a total misreading of history.

I also do not see this as a signal that the world to be ruled by one super-power in the future. That would be too grave a nightmare for mankind. Instead I clearly see that the decline of Russia as a super-power is destined to be followed by the gradual decline of America as a super-power, and the emergence of new poles of power in Europe and the Far-East, The Muslim World can also become one such pole of power if it is prepared to set its own house in order. History does not wait for people. The Muslims must realize that they have a role to play as an ideological community and as an Ummah consisting of over a billion people, constituting about 20 percent of the world population and having political control over about 23 percent of the land area of the world and most important possessing an ideology that is capable of looking after the spiritual and material aspects of human life and society.

I also feel that man's quest for the spiritual sublimity and material welfare, for freedom and justice, for moral excellence and worldly prosperity and tranquility will continue. This would produce new conflicts as well as new experiments. In this process some of the contributions made by socialism in the form of emphasizing the social dimensions of human life, need for planning, care for welfare and concern for equity shall continue to play a role, although the overall culture of communism as developed under Marxist influence has failed and I see little possibility of its revival.

The Muslim World and the Third World countries should also realize that there would be huge diversion of resources from the developed countries of the world to Eastern Europe which would mean further reduction of resources available for the countries of Asia and Africa. While this would create hardships for the poorer people of the world I also see in it the possibility that the rest of the world may be able to see the hollowness of the western civilization and its approach to problems of mankind. This may awaken in these countries of the world a new realization of

drawing back on their own spiritual and material resources and to pursue a path different from the one based on the western civilization and its socio-economic ideologies of capitalism and communism. As such I look towards the coming decades as a period that may be characterized by fundamental re-thinking and review by mankind and a period of fundamental ideological and socio-economic change.

I am also struck by the fact that change in most of the parts of the Eastern Europe has been rather peaceful, although I am not sure this trend will continue. Change in Romania has been soaked in blood. Tinaman Square had its own casualties. The scenario in Russia is haunted by blood-letting. Yet the Eastern European transition has been far less painful than any of the earlier revolutionary episodes.

It is also becoming very clear that use of force for the imposition of ideas and ideologies has its limitations. Thoughts imposed by force are destined to be overthrown once the power behind that force weakens. Ideas that last are the ones that are based on conviction and nurtured by a faith which springs out of voluntary acceptance and deepened through understanding. Man and his thoughts cannot be put under permanent shackles. Freedom is not an expediency it is the very breath and soul of man. Only that social order would be able to last which is accepted by the people from the deepest recesses of their soul and which represents the flowering of their choice. This bears for the future of man a message of hope and I take pride in that.
