

US hegemony 'disrespects' Islam

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There continues to be a perception that a US hegemony exists in global policy matters which at the same time, manages to antagonise the Muslim world.

To set the record straight, the US can carry out several exercises to restore their esteem in the eyes of the world. These ideas were spelt out at the US-Islamic World Forum which concluded at the Ritz-Carlton here yesterday.

These were the conclusions drawn in a paper by Dalia Mogahed, Executive Director of Muslim Studies with the reputed Gallup Organisation. Her findings were read out in a session yesterday entitled 'Where Do We Go From Here' by Carlos Pascual, Vice-President and Director of the Foreign Policy Studies Programme at the Brookings Institution.

The American hegemony, Pascual said, seems to signify a sense of disrespect to Islam, compounded by a lack of appreciation and understanding. "There are growing tensions between Muslims and non-Muslims. And in the fifth year of this conference, we still see these tensions," said Pascual.

Mogahed's ideas should ideally appeal to the Americans' sense of fair play. Over the continuing Israel-Palestine conflict, she suggests an end to violence, a freeze on settlements, granularity for a two-state solution and mutual state recognition.

The solution to Iraq is just as straightforward, as she suggests regional engagement in support of national reconciliation.

With Iran, there should be nuclear negotiations; for Lebanon, a policy of reconciliation and reconstruction and Afghanistan should be offered viable livelihoods and security. And to reassure countries who feel threatened by US domination, there would be nothing better than shutting down facilities like Guantanamo Bay as well as to renounce torture.

David Ignatius, an Associate Editor and columnist with The Washington Post, simply stated: "We are in a ditch. There is such a thing as strategic listening. The US should be serious about Palestine. No lip service, as it is an existential issue."

The US should set a timetable for leaving Iraq and turn to issues caused by the invasion. "This would mean containing the civil war in Iraq and work to protect people from catastrophic humanitarian consequences. Oil supplies should be monitored, not just for the US but for the region. We should talk to Iraq's neighbours and make multilateralism work. Once again, paying mere lip service will not do. We need help, we need support," said Ignatius.

Another journalist, Rami Khouri, editor-at-large and a former Executive Editor of Beirut's Daily Star, said the Middle East is now suffering from 1920s-style post-colonial disorder and neo-colonial disorder, both at the same time.

He came down hard on officials and bureaucrats who made an appearance at the conference stating they gave the "most unsatisfying presentations".

He added: "The conference here was productive in identifying problems but not in getting solutions."