

## *The World Turns Right*

By Muqtedar Khan

The ideological orientation of the world is undergoing a slow but definite shift to the right. Compare recent elections in some key countries to those in the mid- and late-1990s, and this global shift becomes clearly discernable.

In the 1990s, when globalization was at its peak, nations were generally doing well economically and felt confident in strengthening the welfare state. Thus Bill Clinton in the U.S., Tony Blair in UK, and Muhammad Khatami in Iran came to power. All were clearly left of center on economic and social issues. Their major electoral strategy was to redefine the welfare state to accommodate the rapid growth of the global economy. Their winning constituency was a combination of women and center-left sectors.

But in November 2002 alone we have seen a significant swing of the pendulum in the opposite direction. In the U.S., the right-led Republican Party has not only strengthened its hold over the House in Congress, it also recaptured the Senate. In addition, it did unexpectedly well in gubernatorial races, indicating that the shift to the right is not limited to national issues connected with security and the war on terror but is now percolating to sub-national issues too.

In Turkey, the pro-Islamist Justice and Development Party (AKP) has unexpectedly come to power with a massive majority of seats capable of amending the national constitution. Although the AKP may be liberal economically, focusing on issues of economic justice, it is socially conservative and can be expected to lean right on foreign policy issues.

Riding a wave of popular anger over American anti-terrorist operations in Afghanistan and Pakistan, an alliance of six conservative/religious parties captured power in two of the four provinces in Pakistan. The United Action

Forum, whose platform is clearly hostile to the United States, also posted significant gains in the National Assembly, emerging from the elections as the country's third-largest party and giving it a decisive role in the coalition government that will be formed.

It is possible to connect the electoral outcomes in the U.S. and Pakistan directly to the aftermath of the attacks on the U.S. on September 11th. The global feeling of insecurity and apprehension as a result of the rhetoric of war and counter-violence is the primary cause for this global shift to the right. It is also interesting to note that along with the shift to the right comes the resurgence of religious influence on politics. One can see this vividly in the heightened political significance of the Christian Right in the U.S. and the success of pro-Islamist parties in Turkey and Pakistan.

What does all this mean? It means that security will trump trade and economics on the global agenda. Public spending for development and for infrastructure will give way to security spending, increased defense budgets and more investment in military technology and intelligence-related assets. Fear of international terrorism has already created tension between states and non-state actors. States will now place more restrictions on the free flow of people, ideas, capital, and technology across their borders.

The pace of globalization will significantly retard, and perhaps may even see some reversal. Immigration and refugee procedures will come under greater scrutiny and in spite of the call for cooperation against terrorism; states will increasingly take unilateral actions against real or perceived threats to national interests within their borders and overseas. The fear of violence and the right's traditional support of a national security state will threaten civil liberties and

democracy in several countries where the right is ascendant.

The global shift to the right may or may not prove long-lasting. But it is definitely going to cause significant

restructuring of domestic economies and the nature of international trade.

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