

Looking Beyond the US Presidential Elections

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Introduction

Although this article will essentially dwell upon the current direction of the US policy and some likely outcomes, it needs to be clarified that putting the blame on the USA for all the world's ills is not likely to make many of the seemingly intractable problems disappear. It has become facile to attribute the advent of global terrorism to ill-conceived US policies of earlier days. No doubt they contributed to the radicalisation of Pakistan and the networks spawned by the Pakistan military machine - flush with Saudi funds, drug money and misappropriated US aid. Nevertheless, equal blame needs to be apportioned on the Pakistan and Saudi regimes for diverting hundreds of millions of dollars to the spread of Sunni orthodoxy. It is still continuing. Had the billions of dollars earned from the rise in oil revenues been expended for uplifting the lot of the Muslim world rather than for spreading anti-modern theology, the plight of the people of these countries would not have been as abysmal as it is today. Similarly, had the Pakistan-Taliban-Al Qaeda regime actually got down to improving the lot of the people of Afghanistan once they had consolidated their hold on the hapless country, instead of spreading terror around the world, a model Afghan state would have been a beacon for other Muslim countries.

However, the motivations of the prime movers were different. They were attempting to usher in an imperium of the orthodox elements in the region, till they ran into the ambitions of the other super-imperialist of the new century, the USA.¹

According to a former US Secretary of State, demography too played a consequential role in adding to the decline in the

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Muslim world on account of fast multiplying populations. The submissive role forced on women led to the population explosion. "Generations of young people have grown up in these societies with a surplus of time on their hands and a deficit of productive occupations".² The irony cannot be lost. It is well-known that Iraq's secular regime, in marked contrast to most of its neighbours, was laying emphasis on shunning religious extremism while giving women equal status and protecting the rights of its Christian and other minorities.

The caveats were essential to bring the discussion of the US hegemony onto an even keel, it not being the intention to look at the coming US presidential election in a stand alone manner, which, this time around, will be greatly influenced by events outside the USA - both economic and geophysical - over which the superpower might be gradually losing control. The paper scans a few basic issues under the following heads:-

- (a) Hidden aspects behind 11 September 2001.
- (b) The changing nature of conflicts.
- (c) US-Pakistan : the strange relationship.
- (d) USA: the dangerous drift.
- (e) The unanswered questions.

Hidden Aspects Behind 11 September 2001

Around mid-July 2004, the Senate report on the US intelligence was released. Toward the end of July, the 11 September 2001 Commission report was made public. Both focused on the same theme: the US intelligence community failed to function effectively before the 11 September 2001 attacks. Commenting on the shortcomings they avoid bringing to light what has long been suspected in many circles in the USA and the world. The tantalising question that emerges is: "what went wrong in the intelligence community"? The simplest explanation would be that the US intelligence services were not as remiss in their work as is made out to be. They were peripherally alive to the fact that a plot to

carry out attacks in the US was in the offing. There were too many tell-tale signs strewn around. The Pakistan Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) hierarchy that hatched the plot and the small group in Washington in the know were aware of it. They felt that a "controlled" outrage in stateside USA could be their excuse to put into effect the US grand design for the Middle East. The head of the Pakistan ISI, General Mahmoud Ahmed, gave instructions for the wiring of the US \$ 100,000 before the 11 September 2001 attacks to Mohammed Atta, the lead hijacker. General Ahmed, the paymaster was in Washington on 11 September 2001 having a series of pre-11 September 2001 top-level meetings in the White House, the Pentagon, the National Security Council, with George Tenet, then head of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), and Marc Grossman, the Under-Secretary of State for Political Affairs. When Ahmed was exposed by the *Wall Street Journal* as having sent the money to the hijackers, he was forced to "retire" by President Musharraf. The US has not demanded that he be questioned and tried in court. Nor has the 11 September 2001 Commission made this recommendation in its report. There was strong evidence of foreign intelligence backing for the 11 September 2001 hijackers. The US government has been keen to cover it up. Was it because it had been in the know *ab initio*? Senator Bob Graham, chairman of the Senate select committee on intelligence, has averred: "I think there is very compelling evidence that at least some of the terrorists were assisted, not just in financing ... by a sovereign foreign government." In the same context, Horst Ehmke, former coordinator of the West German secret services, observed: "Terrorists could not have carried out such an operation with four hijacked planes without the support of a secret service."

It gives meaning to the reaction on 11 September 2001 of Richard Clarke, the White House counter-terrorism chief, when he saw the passenger lists later in the day: "I was stunned ... that there were Al Qaeda operatives on board using names that the FBI knew were Al Qaeda." It was just that, as Dale Watson, head of counter-terrorism at the FBI told him, the "CIA forgot to tell us about them".

The CIA did not forget to tell them. It was not an oversight. They had deduced that several people in Washington and Islamabad

were in the know. General Ahmed was physically present, monitoring, according to some sources, the attacks, in a manner of speaking, in situ. Or so he thought. The scheme went awry. The complete collapse of the twin towers was not scripted. The agents who carried out the attack, not owing allegiance to the Pakistan ISI had their own agenda, once the Pakistanis had paved the way for them. What followed hardly requires elaboration. Another comment from the USA on the 11 September 2001 Commission's report, tends to corroborate this:

The 11 September 2001 commission's report is insightful in tracing the failures - intellectual, moral and technical - that made the September 11 attacks possible. What it does not explain - and what remains inexplicable - is why the Bush administration would believe that the attacks did not prove the need for an urgent overhaul of US intelligence, but that business as usual would suffice. Whatever one thinks of Bush on other subjects, this decision remains unexplained and undefended.

The answer is again very simple. No major overhaul was carried out because it was not an intelligence failure, as perceived by the rest of the world. The attack itself was not a surprise to the US establishment. It was a controlled exercise that got out of hand unknown to the abettors in Islamabad. Many of the inexplicable actions of the US establishment in the days that followed fall into place when looked at through the prism of the explanation just outlined. It focuses attention on the direct penetration of the governance process and the media networks by the military-industrial complex. At least 32 secretaries and other senior staffers of the present US Administration are former board members, consultants or shareholders of the largest armament industries and 17 of them are connected to the key suppliers of the missile defence system. The oil lobby and the military contractors need no longer put pressure on the administration since they are the Administration. That is why, while three US generals - General Anthony Zinni, General Joseph Hoar, and Major General Charles Swannack Jr stated recently that the US occupation is failing in its objectives, President Bush continues to assert that he expects Iraq to become a democracy that will inspire other Middle Eastern countries to become democratic.

The difference between the ground reality in Iraq and the statements coming out from Washington is so marked that it is best explained by the observation made by the noted economist John Kenneth Galbraith: "Corporate power is the driving force behind US foreign policy – and the slaughter in Iraq".

The Changing Nature of Conflicts

The world is witnessing a new pattern of warring. Each side now practices unprecedented savagery to the extent that the need for physical annihilation of the opponent supersedes the geopolitical imperatives of the two sides. The change did not come about suddenly. High technology and the shadowy nature of the opponent have played their part. Actually it is a continuum from the past of the genes programmed into the imperialist powers. A few examples from Iraq itself should suffice: Winston Churchill commenting on the British use of poison gas against the Iraqis after the First World War:

I am strongly in favour of using poisoned gas against uncivilised tribes. The moral effect should be good... and it would spread a lively terror...

The words, uttered in the halcyon days of the Empire, as the British ventured into Mesopotamia after the defeat of Turkey in the First World War, provide a glimpse into the mind of the great English statesman, whose sentiment expressed over 80 years ago has apparently lingered. As envisioned by Churchill, the use of deadly, inhuman weapons – in the present case depleted uranium (DU) - did spread lively terror in Iraq - even if the rest of the world failed to see the 'moral effect'.

Another example of the same mindset was shown when American pilots bombing and strafing, with depleted uranium weapons helpless retreating Iraqi soldiers who had already surrendered, exclaimed:

We toasted him.... we hit the jackpot....a turkey shoot....shooting fish in a barrel....basically just sitting ducks... There's just nothing like it. It's the biggest Fourth of July show you've ever seen, and to see those tanks just 'boom', and more stuff just keeps spewing out of them... they just become white hot. It's wonderful.³

These campaigns mean a new type of warfare that substitutes firepower for manpower, airpower for infantry, and technology for reduced physical presence on the battlefield. It is still evolving. Should it succeed – in spite of the difficulties being faced by the US troops at present - it could become the model for North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO's) future strategy and lead to force restructuring in many countries. Going by the current setbacks in Afghanistan, Iraq and even Waziristan it would be an indication, however, that technological innovations cannot entirely replace the human dimension of warfare. Most experts have agreed that there is still the need for sufficient number of "boots on the ground."

The war on terror is leading to market forces now dominating the military scene, blurring the distinction between private and public armies, even countries as in Iraq and Afghanistan. Wherever there is a shortfall in regular soldiers, private security agencies have been filling the gap. Nevertheless, they may still fall short of expectations when confronting stateless shadowy persons. Not being able to pin down the enemy or seize the initiative from the adversary, results in more savage bombing and destruction of the infrastructure. At the end of the day it required a non-military person to see the fallacy of the proposition of mindless destruction with bigger and bigger bombs.

... one point (is) perfectly clear. We can bomb the world to pieces, but we can't bomb it into peace!⁴

That being the case, peace in the neighbourhood is not likely to come about unless the spending priorities are reversed. For example, in Afghanistan, according to Christian Aid, the US has spent \$40 billion on military operations, while the international spending on aid is \$4.5 billion. However, the non governmental organisations (NGO) sector itself has long outgrown its charitable beginnings and is now a global player. Globally some 26,000 NGOs employ 19 million people and dispose of around \$1 trillion in finance, much of it directly from governments.

USA-Pakistan : The Strange Relationship

The Pakistan Army will continue to be a surrogate for the US plans in the region for the foreseeable future, regardless of

Al Qaeda and the Taliban, and irrespective of Pakistan being the fount and epicentre of radical Islamist terrorism, as also the nerve centre of nuclear proliferation. None of these aspects alarm Washington to the same extent as they do to rest of the world, for the simple reason that several entities in Washington have always been in the know of what was happening in Islamabad. They have invariably manipulated the Pakistani military hierarchy for their own ends. The reverse proposition is equally tenable. An elaboration is required.

Within hours of General Musharraf's announcement of AQ Khan's pardon, Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage praised Musharraf as "the right man at the right time", adding that Pakistan had been "very forthright in the last several years with us about proliferation"! An official of the US State Department clarified that it was for Pakistan to decide how to deal with AQ Khan. During his visit to Pakistan on 17 March 2004, Secretary of State Colin Powell announced that the US government had decided to designate Pakistan as a major non-NATO ally. USA's friends in the Commonwealth did their bit by getting Pakistan's suspension from the Commonwealth (continued since Musharraf's coup in October 1999) revoked. Pakistan was complimented for progress made in restoring democracy and rebuilding democratic institutions!

Notwithstanding the above, Dr Ronald McCoy, President, International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War speaking at the NATO Defence College Conference on 'Future Challenges for Non-Proliferation Instruments at Rome: 16-17 March 2004 stated that:

The revelation of AQ Khan's black market in nuclear technology is a wake-up call to the international community.

'Tick, Tick, Tick' is the title of an article appearing in the October 2004 issue of *The Atlantic Monthly*. The article by Graham Allison talks of Pakistan becoming a nuclear time bomb, perhaps the greatest threat to American security today. The author does not talk of a nuclear exchange with India, but of the direct and immediate threat to the US security from rogue elements within Pakistan, who could be embedded sympathisers from within the

military establishment or of radical Islamist *tanzöems* in Pakistan that spawned the Taliban and have close links to Al Qaeda. He elaborates that Pakistan's nuclear complex poses a great threat, "as, highlighted by Khan's black-market network, is that nuclear weapons know-how or materials will find their way into the hands of terrorists". For instance, in August 2001, even as the final planning for 11 September 2001 was under way, Osama Bin Laden received two former officials of Pakistan's atomic energy programme - Sultan Bashiruddin Mahmood and Abdul Majid - at a secret compound near Kabul. Over the course of three days of intense conversation Bin Laden and his second-in-command, Ayman al-Zawahiri, grilled Mahmood and Majid about how to make weapons of mass destruction. After Mahmood and Majid were arrested, on 23 October 2001, Mahmood told Pakistani interrogation teams, working in concert with the CIA, that Osama Bin Laden had expressed a keen interest in nuclear weapons and had sought the scientists' help in recruiting other Pakistani nuclear experts who could provide expertise in the mechanics of bomb-making. CIA Director George Tenet found the report of Mahmood and Majid's meeting with Bin Laden so disturbing that he flew directly to Islamabad to confront President Musharraf. This was not the first time that Pakistani agents had rendered nuclear assistance to dangerous actors. Pakistan's nuclear programme has long been a leaky vessel; the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace has deemed the country "the world's No 1 nuclear proliferator."

Two theories are being currently presented by the USA's investigative reporters in explanation of the amazingly favourable treatment of Pakistan's crimes of nuclear proliferation by the USA. According to Seymour Hersh⁵, the USA has agreed to accept Musharraf's action in consideration for Musharraf allowing the US troops to hunt for Osama Bin Laden in the frontier areas of Pakistan where Osama Bin Laden is believed to be hiding. Musharraf is further stated to have offered to provide human intelligence for tracking him down.

According to the second theory presented by Jason Leopold writing in *South Asia Tribune* USA's acceptance of Musharraf's action was actually meant to shield Dick Cheney who had known

of Pakistan's proliferation activities for more than a decade and took no corrective action. According to Leopold, in 1989, Richard Barlow, a young Pentagon analyst had prepared a report for Cheney who was then working as the US Secretary of Defence in the Bush (Senior) administration. The report said that Pakistan had built the bomb and was selling nuclear technology and equipment to countries, which the US said were sponsoring terrorism.

Barlow's report was politically inconvenient because its acceptance would have resulted in the cutting off of the US aid to Pakistan and would have killed the \$1.4 billion sale of F-16 fighter jets to Pakistan. Desperately wanting to sell the F-16s to Pakistan, Cheney dismissed Barlow's report. Some months later a Pentagon official was told by Cheney to downplay Pakistan's nuclear capabilities when he testified before the Congress. Barlow complained to his bosses at the Pentagon and ended up being fired.

Although the USA and many other countries that are putting pressure on Iran have put the lid on the revelation late last year that Abdul Qadeer Khan, the founder of Pakistan's nuclear weapons programme, had been selling nuclear technology and services on the black market, the enormity of the exercise has shaken the establishments of these countries to the core. As is nearly always the case the hidden part of this iceberg conceals much more. In spite of the need to keep supporting General Musharraf, it has become the number one agenda for disarmament lobbies worldwide. The head of the International Atomic Energy Agency has called it a "Wal-Mart of private-sector proliferation" - a decades-old illicit market in nuclear materials, designs, technologies, and consulting services, all run out of Pakistan. The Pakistani government's response to the scandal was hardly reassuring. Pakistan's official position remains that no member of Musharraf's government had any concrete knowledge of the illicit transfer - an assertion that the US intelligence officials in Pakistan and elsewhere have dismissed as absurd.

The scale of the proliferation activities give an indication that in addition to the involvement of the military hierarchy of Pakistan,

several Western intelligence agencies were in the know, if not at the highest levels, certainly at the operating level. The connections formed in the earlier periods of cooperation in Afghanistan in the 1980s ensured that knowledge. Following from it, an obvious conclusion is that the enormous sums that were paid did not go into the Pakistan treasury. These sums would be likely to have been shared by the top military brass of Pakistan, key intermediaries, and the clandestine agencies – hence the reluctance to allow anyone else to interrogate AQ Khan. The intelligence agencies were already using narcotics related funds for activities that would not have received official funding from their respective governments. Cases have been coming to light regularly of the military-industrial complexes' subcontracting the dirty work to mercenary-type agencies.

Indian leaders and government officials are invariably surprised by the soft treatment meted out to Pakistan by the US officials. They do not realise that in many respects Washington and Islamabad were, and still remain, hand in glove. Richard Armitage and General Colin Powell have both been recipients of awards from the Pakistan government – a fact seldom mentioned these days.

USA: The Dangerous Drift

Jeffery D Sachs mentions that, "The main problem with fiscal policy is that politicians can easily make themselves temporarily popular by cutting taxes and increasing public spending while running up massive public debts, leaving repayment to the future. This trick can last a few years, but sooner rather than later budget deficits and growing public debt force a painful policy reversal. Yet a cynical politician can buy himself re-election and perhaps be in retirement when the crisis arrives". He goes on to say: "There are vital lessons for other countries. The looming US budget deficits will sooner or later limit America's international power. Americans supported the Iraq war only because they didn't have to pay for it with increased taxes. When Americans are forced to choose between foreign adventures and higher taxes, they are less likely to support expensive military operations abroad. Indeed, the US

will be deeply divided internally as the public grapples with the fiscal mess left by Bush".⁶ In a similar vein historian Niall Ferguson had remarked that American military might cannot translate into imperialism, as historically defined, because no successful imperial power has ever been so pitifully dependent on foreign money. It may not be known that total US defence spending dwarfs the official defence budget.

The \$401.3 billion defence budget for 2004 is huge. The "official" sum, however, greatly underestimates total US defence spending. Add together all defence-related spending by federal agencies and it amounts to about \$754 billion – a good 88 percent more than \$401.3 billion - according to Robert Higgs, senior fellow in political economy at the Independent Institute and editor of *The Independent Review*.

In December 2001, George W Bush abrogated the Anti Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty. By 2005, half-dozen interceptors could come up in Alaska, four in California, 10 more will be added in Alaska, 10 at a third site not yet determined, and 10 will be placed at sea. It is axiomatic that excessive military spending on the part of the superpower will propel the world to newer heights of militarism, bringing in its wake greater destruction.

In 1997, Zbigniew Brzezinski wrote that "retaining planetary superpower status by the USA can be summed up by three great geostrategic imperatives :-

- (a) Avoiding collusion between vassals and keeping them in the dependency justified by their need for security.
- (b) Fostering the obedience of the protected.
- (c) Preventing the 'barbarians' from forging aggressive alliances.

By stating that she will henceforth act "before the threat becomes manifest", is to say that before the reality of the threat may be demonstrated, America expects others to accept her word as law. The doctrine of 'dissuasion' or containment is hence forsaken.⁷

Another issue is the psychological disorientation taking place among the US troops deployed in Iraq, a good six months or more before the Abu Ghraib incidents came to light. The psychological stress engendered in tens of thousands of young soldiers could be far more damaging in the long run than the physical casualties being suffered in Iraq. What is more, when they return their discontent will diffuse through the bloodstream of American civil society generating secondary stresses not anticipated at this juncture, perhaps deliberately so. No longer will returning soldiers be welcomed as heroes in joyful parades in small towns scattered across America. There will be no 'yellow ribbons' on the trees leading into town. In all probability the soldiers would prefer to slink back into anonymity. Fearing this discontent could be a major calculus in the decision of the US administration to postpone large-scale troop rotation from Iraq till after the US presidential election. President Bush told reporters at a press conference several months ago that the US troops would remain in Iraq indefinitely.

More than 4,000 scientists - including 48 Nobel Prize winners - have accused the Bush administration of distorting and suppressing science to suit its political goals. It would be pertinent to recall that Richard Nixon was re-elected at the height of the resistance to the Vietnam War. George McGovern, the antiwar candidate was defeated in a landslide. Nixon was elected on the basis of his appeal to white supremacy, which still remains strong among the majority of whites in the US. The Republicans have been exploiting that sentiment successfully ever since. Elections did not stop the Vietnam War. It was the anti-Vietnam War movement that stopped the war in spite of the electoral results. Should something similar happen now in the US and the UK, the world and the US would be better served. Besides the US military stuck in Iraq, as the institution of the military seems to be rotting internally, there are two players who will most probably determine the outcomes in Iraq: the international anti-war movement and the Iraqi resistance. The latter has the dominant role because they now have the battlefield initiative and staying power. The central paradox for the Bush administration, as one writer put it is: "They are now in a situation where it is 'politically impossible' to leave, but it is militarily impossible to win".

The US government has entered a new arms race, redirecting up to \$10 billion toward biodefence research. Officials have justified this biodefence push as a necessary evil in the shadow of what a CIA report has called the "darker bioweapons future." It is a "modern-day Manhattan project" whose ramifications are being overlooked by an uninformed public. By frantically pursuing research that could potentially change the face of biological science as is currently known another Pandora's box is being opened. A growing number of microbiologists, with relatively poor oversight, could actually be paving the way for the next generation of killer germs. In October 2003, the National Academy of Sciences released a little-noticed report warning that "the government has no mechanism to prevent 'the misuse of tools, technology, or knowledge base of this research enterprise for offensive military or terrorist purposes.'"

In 2003, close to half the total US government discretionary expenditure was used for military purposes. A large part was for weapons procurement or development. Nuclear-powered submarines run to billions of dollars, individual planes to tens of millions each. Such expenditure is not the result of detached analysis. From the relevant industrial firms come proposed designs for new weapons and to them are awarded production and profit. In an impressive flow of influence and command, the weapons industry accords valued employment, management, pay and profits in its political constituency, and indirectly it is a treasured source of political funds. The gratitude and the promise of political help go to Washington and to the defence budget; and to foreign policy or, as in Vietnam and Iraq, to war. That the private sector moves to a dominant public sector role is apparent. Given its authority in the modern corporation it was natural that management would extend its role to politics and to government. Once there was the public reach of capitalism; now it is that of corporate management. In the US, corporate managers are in close alliance with the president, the vice-president and the secretary of defence. Major corporate figures are also in senior positions elsewhere in the federal government; one came from the bankrupt and thieving Enron to preside over the Army.

The Unanswered Questions

There are many questions that remain unanswered. The ones uppermost in people's minds could include the following:-

- (a) The outcome of the US Presidential election.
- (b) What Happens Next in Iraq?

Taking up the first question the realisation dawns that the absence of ethics and morality in governance is also being globalised at an accelerated pace. It is radically re-shaping the attitude of governments to the people who elected them. It is the major outlays that decide – for individuals, societies and nations – the pattern of returns, confirming the wisdom of the old adage, 'as you sow, so you reap'. Hence, if the leading nation of the world is spending \$ half a trillion on its military systems, when it is the strongest nation in the world, the result cannot but be heightened militarism. The pattern is no longer restricted to the military-industrial complex. Till a few years ago an enlightened leadership in the United States could have given the lead for reversing nuclear proliferation. Being the lone superpower it should still, on the face of it, be in a position to take the lead. What is the ground reality, however? An enlightened leader with the attributes required to reverse the dangerous decline might not find it possible today to come to the fore and win election to the office of the President of the United States. The interests that have taken an iron grip over the Washington establishment, the media and wealth formation will simply not allow such a species to co-exist. A few hard facts should suffice to confirm the observation :-

- (a) The two principal contenders for the White House in the elections were both agreed on the need for the Iraq invasion in spite of the 11 September 2001 Commission report and exposures of deliberate falsifications that took place at the highest levels of governance.
- (b) A significant percentage of Americans still support the decision to invade Iraq, in spite of the wide dissemination of the 11 September 2001 Commission report, the rise in US

casualties and the near-universal condemnation of the US policies in Iraq.

(c) A look at the board members of media companies is revealing. In America a large number of the directors of NBC, CBS and ABC all have common involvement with Rothschild, Rockefeller and Morgan companies, as well as being members of the Council on Foreign Relations and Trilateral Commission. In Britain, the *Daily Telegraph* is owned by the Hollinger group, whose advisors and directors include Henry Kissinger, Lord Carrington, Brzezinski and Lord Rothschild. The current chairman of NM Rothschild, Evelyn de Rothschild, is on the board of the *Daily Telegraph*. A former board member, Andrew Knight, is now executive chairman of the 'rival' News International, which runs *The Times* and the *Sun*, and which is funded by the Oppenheimers and the Rothschilds. Regulatory bodies such as the Press Complaints Commission also have links with the same people eg the chairman Lord Wakeham who is a director of NM Rothschild.

(d) A handful of media barons have a stranglehold on the global media. The extent of the media holdings of Rupert Murdoch and the influence that a single individual wields in shaping the global discourse and, what is more important, the public position on that discourse hardly needs elaboration.

(e) Private military companies (PMC) - mercenaries in plainer language – manning the occupation administration's front lines are now the third-largest contributor to the war effort after the United States and Britain. They will be even less amenable to civilised restraints in the countries where they are deployed.

(f) Star Wars is no longer a futuristic theory. The US will station 10 missile interceptors in Alaska and California, with more to follow soon. The Pentagon has spent \$16 billion on the project, with major funding increases on the way.

Coming to the question of Iraq, it would be pointless reiterating that the USA has made a mess of it and is deeply mired without an exit strategy. Britain played an equally perfidious role in goading

the US administration into the Iraq folly. In the process it ended up by accelerating the schisms in the Atlantic Alliance. Whether Tony Blair wins the next elections or is defeated at the polls is not the issue, as is being made out to be. There are deeper underlying issues that now confront the world when planet-destroying technologies are proliferating. Can the defeat of the incumbents in the USA and the UK be sufficient recompense for unimaginable chaos and suffering brought on by the whims and fancies of just two individuals in temporary control of the levers of power. Would the world be able to sustain follies of this nature in future? Therefore, the questions before the world have to be substantially reframed - by the global public, if political dispensations around the world in their moral degeneracy are unable to look beyond the limited interests of self-perpetuation. Iraq is a wake up call for the world to put its house in order. If further disaster is to be averted the following issues need to be confronted:-

(a) A catastrophic decline in the US power is not in the global interest.

(b) However, the USA must be obliged to conform to global norms of conduct as enshrined in the United Nations (UN) Charter, in letter and spirit. It must adhere to the Biological and Toxic Weapons Convention (BTWC) and ratify the Kyoto Protocol as well as the International Criminal Court (ICC) Convention. It must put a stop to the militarisation of space.

(c) Failing which, all countries, allies and non-allies must cut off bilateral dialogues and abrogate, in a phased manner, their special relationships with the superpower. There is no other way to restore sanity to a world hurtling toward self-destruction.

(d) The limits of 'superpowerhood' stand exposed in Iraq and Afghanistan. The same is applicable in the economic sphere. Without support from NATO, the United Nations Security Council and its G8 allies, America simply cannot go it alone. It is these others who underpin the US power, led lemming-like on account of the deferential attitudes fostered during the long years of the Cold War. The moment they decide to remove their shackles, without necessarily upsetting

the applecart, the US will be more amenable to a reasoned dialogue.

(e) The situation in Iraq has provided the world an opportunity to restore the primacy of the UN. It can also become an enabling environment for overdue UN reform, provided individual nations stop making private deals with the US.

(f) The ruling elite in India, Japan, Germany and Brazil must *not* hanker after a permanent UN Security Council seat. At this critical juncture they must come together to force general reform of the UN. Together they represent a formidable force in the world forum that cannot be ignored for long.

Conclusion

The director of the International Atomic Energy Agency, Mohamed El-Baradei, has opined that, "Unless we are moving steadily toward nuclear disarmament, I'm afraid that the alternative is that we'll have scores of countries with nuclear weapons and that's an absolute recipe for self destruction." Given current US policy for maintaining a nuclear arsenal for the indefinite future, threatening non-nuclear countries, and doing research into new types of usable nuclear weapons, nuclear disarmament appears to be a distant dream, thus making proliferation a more likely nightmare.⁸

More than a decade after the USSR, Russia is drifting into a new arms race with the US. It is incredible that America spends more on nuclear weapons than when the Cold War peaked. Sadly, Moscow is responding by diverting scarce resources to modernise its nuclear forces. Under President George W Bush, the US has aggressively started asserting its narrowly defined interests, not heeding world opinion or traditional American foreign policy priorities.

Today only two entities threaten each other and the world with the threat of weapons of mass destruction, these being the superpower USA and its principal adversary the shadowy radical elements out to hit the USA wherever they can. At least for the next 10 to 15 years the nuclear exchange at the lowest kiloton

yields is more likely between these two adversaries. This period becomes the window of opportunity to effectively roll back the nuclear peril. The cataclysmic holocaust that could have resulted from an exchange between the two superpowers during the Cold War decades when the doomsday clock in New York came close to one minute to midnight can be practically ruled out for at least the next decade or two. However, as far as the planet is concerned, the bigger danger to planetary decline stems from massive deforestation, species extinction, breakdown of the inter-species genetic barriers, global warming and, most importantly, the likelihood of the pursuance of the capitalist consumption patterns by the developing world, being propelled by the forces of globalisation into this mould at a self-energising pace. If the remaining virgin forest tracts disappear and the capitalist consumption patterns become the norm for the bulk of the human race the damage to the earth would be far more than a suitcase bomb or a few low yield nuclear bombs going off.

It is above all the US public that must appreciate that at the end of the day the course that America takes in the coming years will depend largely on how the USA deploys its wealth. For example, should it persist with the planet destroying star wars programme, with outlays of tens of billions of dollars, leading up to possibly half a trillion dollars or more over the life of the programme, then America will surely get firmly sucked into the negative spiral of decline and decay. The rest of the world would be dragged down as well. Today unbridled capitalism, which has become the handmaiden of environmental degradation, nuclear proliferation and the militarisation of space, has turned into a 'rogue' process. In other words, it is a runaway process that might no longer be amenable to control.

The global community must now push the US towards ratifying most of the global treaties and protocols that the US has walked out of, or opposed against the wishes of the vast majority of the world's nations. If anything, it should have been the frontrunner for adhering to the Kyoto protocol and the commitment given by the P-5 for collectively moving towards universal nuclear disarmament.

End Notes and References

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