

The US reaction to 9/11

Muhammad Ahsan Yatu

9/11

The terrorism and the tragedy it brought on 9/11 created a dilemma not only for the Americans, who had suffered the direct blow but also for the whole world, which too was immensely disturbed because American connection, good or bad, is universal. The dilemma of Americans was how to hit back and against whom, and where. The terrorists had to be unerringly identified, chased, caught and penalized. This was to be done swiftly and before giving them another chance for another strike. There were problems because the terrorists though vaguely known had no specific location. They were active and everywhere, yet they were by and large untraceable. Hence they could not be overpowered easily no matter how wisely and widely and swiftly they were to be chased.

The whole scenario appeared to be frustrating. Finally the powerful chose to use the superiority factors, force and unlimited wealth. To achieve immediate results, the short cuts were preferred. Instead of chasing the individuals and the groups, the countries that produced or sheltered or motivated their enemies, the militants, were identified for correction. Not only that as preemptive strategy even such countries were also singled out, which might not be having any connection with or sympathy for the militants, but could become a socio-military threat. Afghanistan has already been dealt with, through force and cooperation, due to its 9/11 connection. Iraq is the second in line but as part of anticipatory activity, and sooner or later it too would face the wrath if it does not act as being asked on the subjects of demilitarisation and democratisation. Besides, there are many more in the list. They may include Iran, Saudi Arabia, Libya, Syria, and North Korea. Though Pakistan too is under some scrutiny, due to

will be searched by drawing the parallels and by involving the morality.

Parallels drawn delineate that whoever among the nations is powerful may use muscles against the weak without being checked. Big powers have acted in open aggressive ways too often and successfully. The small powers too did so against their weaker adversaries, when they thought the time was appropriate, though not always with success. In fact power and weakness are relative and related terms. A weak entity against a powerful one may prove powerful for some other (weaker) entity. It holds good for self, societies and states. To elaborate the argument let us look into some examples. For that we better start from the end of WW II. Earlier history too is relevant but the events after WW II are more relevant because America, the main topic of discussion, had dominated the world only after the defeat of Germany and Japan and devastation of Europe.

After WW II, Russia attacked Hungary and Czechoslovakia. The Americans attacked Korea, Cuba, West Indies, Lebanon, Vietnam, and Iraq. The Turks annexed a part of Cyprus. Ethiopia waged a war against Somalia. Indonesia attacked East Timor. India annexed Sikkim, Goa, Dev and Daman, besides annexing two thirds of Kashmir. Pakistan annexed the rest of Kashmir. China assimilated Tibet and one fifth of Kashmir. Israel and Syria occupied a portion of Lebanon. Iraq attacked Iran and vice versa. Iraq also attacked Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. There are many more

There is a clear message to the developing world to become competitive.

rather prefer to disengage but not before destroying the communication systems of its adversaries.

Can America afford such disengagement? The share of developing countries in world business is almost negligible. Globalisation is the beginning of disengagement, but through peaceful means. It is a clear message to the developing world that either live on your own or become competitive to escape isolation. Competitiveness is not possible without modernity in knowledge, governing systems and overall attitudes. It is certainly an uphill task. It may also require ideological reversals like the ones that the Russians and Chinese made.

What seems probable is that the elite of developing countries would not turn to required degree of modernisation. Thus the tussle would continue. The ultimate answer will be early disengagement with America and with all the developed and westernised societies. The disengagement for the developing countries would however

before 9/11. What happened between the two old friends, America and Osama, and why did they become enemies will remain a mystery, but given the magnitude of flow of drugs and arms to and from Afghanistan, the clue may be found in some kind of bargain betrayal. Who doesn't know that the secret agencies have least love for ethics, and CIA is no exception. It is also true about their sponsored militants.

One more oil related myth needs debate. For how long the fossil fuel will meet the growing needs of humanity? The environmental costs are also being felt. The search for other resources is worrying oil producers and fuelling the race for oil sale, and they are making strategies to increase their political influence. And that they are doing through many means and also by using the religion as motivating and gravitating force. A statement from an Arab Prince that the Arabs owe their identity to Islam carries a sea of thoughts.

Without going into Arab identity before Islam, these thoughts and their practical inference, and not the oil are the reasons behind America's aggressive perceptions. Americans feel threatened by social concepts acquiring a military or militancy-based dimension. That is why they believe that a meaningful relation will not be possible unless the selected countries change their social systems and turn to demilitarisation. What is being openly asked is to follow the examples of post WW II Germany and Japan.

terrorists. However, in practice the situation may not respond to hypothesis. The corrective measures may include use of force as one of the instruments or as the only instrument. The option will depend upon the attitudes of the both, one who is to be punished and the one who wants to punish. If the attacker is seeking early results, he may take the use of force as the only option or he may do the same if the one who is to be punished remains rigid. Given the fears that were created among the common Americans even the retaliation that followed has logic, if not ethics. Americans have been pushed backwards at least by two decades. An open society turning to regimentation and the most powerful people feeling unsafe throughout the world are no small after affects. A repetition of what happened on 9/11 may shatter their whole society even for good. Americans will not allow that to happen and will do whatever they will think will yield full results. And they are quite capable of achieving their objectives.

Does similar argument of use of force favour the militants in their aims? Recent history does not have a single success story in this regard. The Russians left Afghanistan on their own. Militancy did harm them but not to that extent, which would have forced them to pack. That was why the Communist government stayed on for three full years even after their departure. Americans left Vietnam only after they had secured their interests in Asia Pacific, which was the main purpose of their stay in South Vietnam. East Timor won its referendum not due to resistance but due to pressures from emerging super power, Australia; and Indonesia's chaotic economy. So unless those who matter are not on the side of resistance, it will not succeed no matter

Syria, and North Korea. Though Pakistan too is under some scrutiny due to growing religious extremism in its society and also due to its nuclear programme, it will be most probably saved from the wrath because of resilience it displays when needed or when asked.

Thus Americans are out of the dilemma of how to respond. They are clear on their strategies and have left no ambiguities for others to ponder. However, for most of the nations of the world the dilemma still exists. American actions, after 9/11, have undoubtedly raised some serious questions: Was degree of American anger and subsequent aggressive planning genuine and justified; was persuasion not the better option; and should the powerful be supported in its efforts of imposing its writ on the weak? The world faces another dilemma about the actions of terrorists, before and after 9/11, and which have raised equally complex questions such as: can terrorism be justified in the name of freedom struggles; is present day terrorism really specific to limited objectives or is it part of bigger games that states play; and can the terrorist or those who sponsor or support them be persuaded to abandon their activities through means other than the use of force; and will terrorism be defeated by the use of force? In fact the gist of all the questions on warring Americans and terrorists is who is right and who is wrong, and who will ultimately win? Answers

and Saudi Arabia. There are many more such examples, where aggression was expressed through open wars. And about the intrigues and hidden wars and terrorism the story is similar. Almost all the countries that had a bit of power used it one way or the other against their weaker enemies. Whether the objectives were right or wrong is again a relative phenomenon; and so is who is wrong and who is right. (All wars mentioned were fought for national interests, and commonality of religion did not become a bar to fighting. Muslims fought many wars among themselves; and so did the others).

Thus the war actions of America are not unique. So many others have behaved similarly. Even the peaceful Scandinavians have made war machines for use by others. Hence there is no ordinary way to stop the Americans if they are bent upon waging wars. There is no ambiguity about the emerging situation either. The developed world will side with America in whatever options it chooses. Such is the strength of the writ that most of the developing world too will act accordingly. The powerful might ultimately win but the wars may create more contradictions than they would solve, if the victory were not total. Would America turn to such means as were used in WW II against Germany and Japan, in case the expected results are not obtained through traditional wars? Most probably it will not; it would

opening countries would, however, prove as fatal as total defeat in a war. In this regard the weapon of oil, and tussle on it (as being propagated) are absolute myths. What is happening today is that the energy rich countries want to sell as much of their oil as they can to meet their living requirements, but the demand is less. In fact the ongoing tussle is between the oil producing countries themselves. Every seller wants to sell more than its competitor.

Precisely for this reason Iran resisted open links between Pakistan, Afghanistan and Central Asian States, and Osama Bin Laden had established his headquarters in Afghanistan. In fact no one among the regional oil producing countries is happy at this stage over the exploration and exploitation of oil reserves of Central Asia. Rivalry is natural because more oil in market will mean less price and reduced sales. So behind the pre-9/11 anarchy in Afghanistan there were many hands. Even America was interested in the continuation of status quo, to blackmail Russia and China if and when needed. That is why it remained till 9/11 the biggest donor of Taliban regime. However, America was opposing the presence of Osama in Afghanistan, and wanted its interests and that of its friends in the Gulf to be watched by indigenous Afghan militants! How strongly America supported the Taliban can be seen in its warnings that it repeatedly gave to the Russians, who wanted to air raid Kabul

How sincere and justified American actions and perceptions are? This calls for a morality-based search for the solution of the dilemma. In human relationships peace and persuasion have played a bigger part than aggression, and for a longer period too. Had it not been so the societies would not have attained the high order they presently possess; and the powerful states would have assimilated or annihilated weaker states, whenever they wished, with or without any pretext. The question is how to bring in the morality? That would demand turning to extraordinary means to meet the American demands. Are American reaction and demands ethical; and should its writ be accepted? Given the magnitude of tragedy of 9/11, the anger of Americans is absolutely valid. American irritation is right through one more reason. Never before in known history the strong was humbled so openly by the weak as on September 11, 2001. The Americans too have been committing aggression, but that cannot justify 9/11. Anyway whether the victim is weak or strong it is inhuman to seek satisfaction in the tragedies he has undergone. Morality demands sincere sympathies from everybody for the Americans.

However, on their subsequent action and mode of retaliation the arguments may differ. Hypothetically, use of force to correct the undesired and to eliminate the un-required is morally wrong. It applies to both the Americans and the

resistance, it will not succeed, no matter how it is carried out. In this regard examples of Kurds should suffice. They have been fighting for independence since long, and their struggle is more valiant than that of Kashmiris or Palestinians, yet no one bothers about them. In fact support for a particular cause also comes when the target is clear and achievable. Speaking frankly the present day burning issues have solutions within the existing geography, though in case of Palestinians Israel may have to surrender some more area. That is how problem of Tamils of Sri Lanka is now being solved. The tragedy is that the militants had rejected the same solution many years earlier.

The harm done to the Americans is not in the interests of developing world. Given the achievements of the Americans in the fields of knowledge, technology, economy and societal uplift, it is better for the underdeveloped world to benefit from their experiences. To turn to modern systems is the need of the underdeveloped world. Why is it spending most of its wealth on the war machines? Why are its elites consuming more and more of national wealth? Their people too need a dignified living. They need bread, education, health care, shelter and certainty and continuity of it. They must have it, and for that there is no way other than cooperating with the west and adopting their systems. It may be understood here that cooperation does not mean subjugation, as demonstrated by Germany and Japan.