

# The gathering storm

*Pake F. Relation  
Dawn  
3/4/05*

By Javid Husain

FEW people would now question the proposition that the US under the Bush administration is in an imperialist mode. The victory of the West in the cold war and the disintegration of the Soviet Union have transformed the US into the only superpower, unrivalled by any other country in terms of military and economic power, political clout or cultural influence.

The US is taking advantage of this opportunity to expand its power and influence further with a view to preventing the emergence in the foreseeable future of a credible challenge to its global supremacy.

In so doing, the US has relied primarily on its national power making use, wherever possible, of its allies to lighten its burden (coalition of the willing) and of the UN to gain legitimacy. Numerous statements by the US leaders, senior officials and scholars lead one to the conclusion that Washington would not allow international law and morality to stand in the way of its expansionism. The US invasion of Iraq in 2003 provided a clear evidence of its imperialist tendencies. Its disregard of the UN, rejection of the International Criminal Court and the Kyoto Protocol, and doctrine of unilateral and preemptive military intervention reflect the low esteem in which it holds multilateralism and international law and morality.

It was predictable that the US expansionism would take place in the direction from where the least resistance could be expected. The Middle East, which is the heartland of the Islamic world,

with its enrichment and reprocessing activities. Significantly, President Bush while expressing his preference for diplomatic efforts, has refused to rule out other options in dealing with Iran's nuclear programme.

Iran, which had agreed last November to a suspension of its uranium enrichment programme as a confidence-building measure in its negotiations with the EU-trio, has categorically refused to halt it permanently. President Khatami recently stressed that Iran would not develop nuclear weapons. At the same time, he reiterated Iran's right to muster nuclear fuel cycle technology for peaceful purposes. Earlier, former Iranian President Rafsanjani also told an international conference of nuclear scientists in Tehran on March 6 that Iran would not stop its uranium enrichment programme. It was not surprising, therefore, that Iran rejected the US offer made on March 11. However, it has expressed its willingness to provide additional guarantees to

we square our declaration of neutrality with our calls for Islamic solidarity and for strengthening the OIC and ECO of which Iran is a prominent and active member.

It was just a few years ago that Pakistan was the target of the US nuclear non-proliferation and democracy sanctions. It was only the reversal of our pro-Taliban policy that endeared us to the US in the aftermath of 9/11. The relevant question here is why our foreign and security policy institutions failed to perceive the serious damage that it was causing to us both internally and externally, so that necessary corrective steps could be taken. It is a pity that we still needed a big push from the US to bring about necessary changes in our Afghanistan policy. The internal adverse consequences of that short-sighted policy on Afghanistan are, however, with us even now as we all know.

In dealing with the growing US pressure on Iran because of its nuclear programme, we cannot rule out the possibility that after subduing Iran Washington may exert severe pressure on Pakistan because of the so-called nuclear proliferation concerns when our cooperation in the war against terrorism is no longer required. It is not without reason that the story about Dr. A.Q. Khan has been kept alive in the western media through well-calculated leaks by unnamed official sources in Washington. It would be worthwhile to remember the example of Saddam Hussein, who was considered a friend by the US in the 1980s when he was serving its interests through the war against Iran, and was brought down when his utility came to an end.

In fact, we should do all that is possible within the framework of our national interests to strengthen our friendship with the US on a long-term, durable and

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East, which is the heart-land of the Islamic world, offered itself as a soft and tempting target for the fulfilment of Washington's imperialist designs.

Like most imperial powers, the US has relied on the policy of divide and rule for the establishment of its hegemony in the Middle East aimed at controlling its oil and gas resources and ensuring Israel's security. Unfortunately, the rulers of the region have easily played into the hands of the western powers led by the US as shown by the Iran-Iraq war and the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait.

Consequently, the whole of the Middle East region is now under the sway of Washington with Iraq under its military occupation, the US military presence in Afghanistan and in the Gulf region, and with most of the governments in the region, falling over each other to comply with the US diktat. Of the two exceptions — Syria and Iran — the former has almost been brought down to its knees while enormous pressure is piling on the latter for the same objective on the pretext of its so-called nuclear-weapons programme.

Tehran has been clearly told by the US that if it does not give up its uranium enrichment and nuclear reprocessing programmes, it would be hauled before the UN Security Council for possible sanctions. The EU-trio (Britain, France and Germany) has been relying mainly on diplomatic, economic and security incentives to persuade Iran to abandon its uranium enrichment programme. Although Washington, in an announcement on March 11, declared its willingness to drop its objections to Iran's entry into WTO and to the supply of spare parts for its civilian aircraft as a gesture of support to European efforts, it has, on the whole, adopted a much harder line on Iran's nuclear programme than the EU-trio.

Top US policy-makers, including Vice-President Dick Cheney and Gen. Abizaid, the head of the US Central Command, have also given hints of military action against Iran's nuclear facilities by Israel if it persists

assure the West that its nuclear programme would remain peaceful.

Admittedly, while non-proliferation is an important consideration behind the western pressure on Iran, there are other and perhaps weightier factors driving the US policy on the subject, the most prominent being the concern about Israel's security whose nuclear monopoly in the region would come to an end unless Iran is checked. It is also possible that in these days of phobia about Islam and the Muslims, the US and other western countries would not like to see another Muslim country besides Pakistan acquire nuclear fuel cycle capabilities.

We have properly defended Iran's right to develop nuclear energy and technology for peaceful purposes while stressing that it must also fulfill its obligations under the NPT. What is not understandable, though, is our declaration of neutrality in case Iran is subjected to a military strike because of its nuclear programme. Despite the later clarification by the government spokesman that Pakistan will not allow its territory to be used for any military action against Iran, this pronouncement is not in Pakistan's best interests. An attack on Iran from whichever direction it comes will destabilize the whole region.

Besides, Pakistan in its own best interest and as a matter of principle cannot afford to remain neutral if a neighbouring and brotherly Islamic country is subjected to aggression. How would we like Iran to react if Pakistan itself becomes the target of foreign aggression? Pakistan also should not forget the support that it received from Iran not only during the wars of 1965 and 1971 but also during the crisis in 2002 when India had mobilized a million troops on our border.

It would also be useful to recall that the Iranian foreign minister paid a visit to Pakistan as a signal of support to us a few days after our nuclear explosions of May 1998 at a time when our western friends had imposed sanctions on us. Further, how do

friendship with the US on a long-term, durable and mutually beneficial basis. At the same time, we should make it abundantly clear to Washington that our friendship with it cannot be at the expense of our friendship with other friendly countries like Iran.

We should, therefore, make it clear to the US that we would politically and diplomatically oppose resort to military means by any quarter in resolving the issues relating to Iran's nuclear programme. Neutrality in the case of an act of aggression against Iran would be morally indefensible, politically undesirable and strategically disastrous as the security and economic well-being of the two countries are closely linked.

One is struck by the total lack of any activity by the OIC on the Iranian nuclear programme at this critical juncture. It appears that the leaders of the OIC member states have lost the capacity to react constructively in the face of the US threats and the western pressure. The situation calls for the convening of an extraordinary session of the OIC foreign ministers conference in consultation with Iran to assess the situation and come out with a united OIC position on the issue.

Dark clouds of a storm with the potential to cause incalculable harm to the security of Iran and Pakistan are gathering on the horizon. In the face of this, the two countries must strengthen their unity and friendship. Unfortunately, the leaders in both the countries made grave mistakes in dealing with the Afghanistan situation during the pre-9/11 period leading to adverse consequences for both sides.

In the face of the external challenges and threats, Pakistan must put its own house in order. This would require a freely-elected democratic government enjoying popular support within the framework of the Constitution. Only such a government can steer the ship of state safely through the turbulent waters ahead.

*The writer is a former ambassador to Iran.*