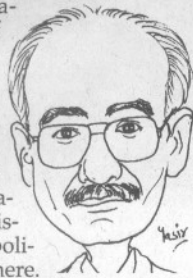


# After Powell's resignation

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The resignation of Colin Powell will ensure that whatever resistance the neo-conservative lobby faced in the formation of the administration's foreign policies is no more there.

Apparently the President has been persuaded that his electoral victory is an affirmation of the foreign policies which have, in fact, estranged America's western allies, made it more unpopular than ever before in the Third World in general and the Muslim community in particular.

They are also liable to give birth to a new arms race. With the departure of Mr Powell there would be no moderating influence in the administration. While the former Secretary of State had faithfully pursued the decisions once they had been taken by the cabinet, he was still widely known as a moderating influence.

This made him unpopular among the neo-con ideologues like Richard Perle and important members of the administration that included Donald Rumsfeld, Dick Cheney and Paul Wolfowitz. With the departure of Mr Powell, the lobby is likely to pursue

their hardline policies at full steam. President Bush's second tenure would further estrange the Muslim world as he tackles the crucial issues of Palestine, Iraq, terrorism and Iran's nuclear capability.

With the State Department led by Condoleeza Rice who, unlike Powell, is incapable of struggling to bend Bush to a more multilateral approach, there is little possibility of the US even putting up a show of even-handedness in the Middle East. The reaction on the part of President Bush on the death of Yasser Arafat indicates that he intends to lean on the Palestinians rather than the Israeli government. The statement makes it clear that as in the past he puts the onus on the Palestinians to end "terrorism" and build political institutions. "I believe that the responsibility for peace is going to rest with the Palestinian people's desire to build a democracy and Israel's willingness to help them build a democracy."

The pro-Likud lobby in the administration would try to foist on the Palestinians a leadership amenable to American pressure rather than stop the Sharon government from practicing state-sponsored terrorism. This would weaken the position of the moderate elements among the Palestinians, increase the influence of

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extremists, and keep the cauldron boiling in the Middle East. Iraq had turned out to be the Achilles heel during President Bush's election campaign. The dilemma that the administration faces now is that while it believes it is impractical to pull out the army at this stage, the longer the army stays the larger the casualties and the greater the resentment at home.

The strategy devised is to raise an Iraqi force to fight the Iraqis. This is, however, taking far too long. The attempt to control Iraq through stooges is also bound to fail. There is little likelihood, however, of an Iraqi government considered widely as a proxy being able to establish peace or even function smoothly in view of the fierce and widespread resistance in Iraq.

Iran and possibly Syria could now be the next target of the US military action. The ground is already being

prepared to get the UN Security Council to impose sanctions on Iran providing an excuse to attack the country. An aggressive action against Iraq will have repercussions all over the region, particularly Pakistan.

President Bush had claimed he had successfully pursued the war on terror to provide security to the American people. The offensive against terrorism will continue to be pursued ruthlessly in disregard of human rights violations. While this would strengthen the hands of authoritarian regimes in the Muslim world, it would also create public resentment against these governments, providing the extremists an opportunity to set up new nurseries of recruits.

With the hardliners in full control of the Bush administration the tendency to act unilaterally while ignoring the UN is likely to be further strengthened. The neo-cons do not consider the US as just a member of the international community but the dominant power in the world.

They believe Washington is in a position to reshape norms and create new realities. The Bush administration is already unhappy with the UN Secretary General for not extending the type of cooperation needed in Iraq. With no moderator left in the admin-

istration, there is a likelihood of the unabashed unilateralism of the Reagan era becoming the hallmark of the second tenure. A policy characterized by an unapologetic and implacable demonstration of will would further worsen relations with the allies.

Among the most dangerous consequences of the policy would be the beginning of another arms race in the world. During his first term President Bush had gone ahead with plans for building the anti-ballistic missile defence system ignoring strong objections from countries that included China. The US also unilaterally withdrew from the nonproliferation treaty. The imperial hubris could now lead President Bush to pursue other weapon systems not in possession of other countries. The Pentagon under Rumsfeld is already set to build the military's secure world wide web for the wars of the future, the so called Global Information Grid (GIG) providing the military "a picture of the battle space, a GIG's eyeview" as Robert J. Stevens, chief executive of the Lockheed Martin Corporation, the world's biggest military contractor, has put it. With the jingoistic team fielded by Bush having got rid of Colin Powell, the world could enter into a new era of arms race.

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