

Bush's policies in second term

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FOLLOWING the start of his second term, President Bush paid a four-day visit to Europe in late February, with a rather ambitious agenda. He wanted to revitalize the trans-Atlantic alliance, still intact and considered important for West's security. He wanted to leave the negative fallout from his war on Iraq behind, and stress the commonalties in values and civilization between the US and Europe, relating to democratic freedoms and a culture based on liberty and human rights.

As the leader of the world's most powerful and richest country, he also sought to highlight its leadership role for a safer, more secure world, which was facing threats from terrorism and non-proliferation, to counter which teamwork was essential. Aware that his unilateralist approach and reliance on military might had affected the image of the US, it was also a tour designed to win back confidence in the values and goals of the US.

Three stops stand out in this tour, the first in Brussels to reaffirm America's support to European integration based on shared goals and perceptions. The visit to Mainz in Germany was used to recall the history of cooperation and joint endeavour to meet the threat from Moscow, which was in control of a

avoid unilateralist rhetoric did not really convince the world that the US was going to act differently during his second term. The neocons retained their dominant position, and the US pursuit of its hardline goals in the Middle East persisted, as it pressed Syria to withdraw its forces from Lebanon, holding it responsible for the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri. The pressure on Iran was also maintained over its nuclear programme, despite assurance that its goals were peaceful and were backed by the IAEA.

Though the holding of elections in Iraq, with a better than expected turnout of voters, was claimed to be reassuring, different kinds of doubts and concerns arose. The Shia coalition had won a majority, and the prospect of a Shia-dominated government in Baghdad was fraught with ominous difficulties, especially as the US-backed coalition of

values with secular ones as the best guarantee of moderation holds the seeds of a long-term confrontation with the Muslim world. Already, many regional experts have started pointing out that even in the West, there are variations in the form of constitutions, and of power structures. What the Islamic world needs is the support to overcome poverty, and to popularize education, so that literacy and awareness improve and facilitate progress towards a tolerant society as well as a prosperous economy.

The latest signals on foreign policy are also being observed fearfully. Though Condoleezza Rice has adopted a traditional approach, as secretary of state, and announced the intention of following the diplomatic path, the nomination of John Bolton, currently under-secretary for nonproliferation and arms control, as ambassador to the UN

has aroused concerns. He is a known hard-liner and has expressed views about the UN in the past about reducing its role as envisaged in its charter and keeping it effectively under Washington's wing.

At a time when the talk about reforming the UN is in the air, with the aim of making it more representative, as well as more effective, Mr Bolton is expected to make a play for making the world body more responsive to US goals. The discussion of his nomination by the Senate may generate much questioning about the administration's attitude towards the world body.

The secretary-general Mr Kofi Annan has been subjected to extreme pressure for expressing the view that the US attack on

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which was in control of a part of Germany. Lastly, the meeting with President Putin of Russia in Bratislava, capital of Slovakia, had great significance, both to put pressure for respecting democratic reforms, and to harmonize policies in meeting the threats from terrorism, religious extremism, and nuclear proliferation.

The outcome was claimed to be a success, as his support to EU and its goals was welcomed, and Chancellor Schroeder of Germany responded warmly to his desire to strengthen the trans-Atlantic friendship and cooperation. The president got mixed results in Russia, where President Putin, while reaffirming his commitment to fight terror, and to prevent nuclear proliferation, refused to end nuclear cooperation with Iran, by terminating transfer of peaceful nuclear technology.

He did not consider this to be nuclear proliferation, on account of its being under IAEA safeguards. The views of the two leaders of former cold war rivals also diverged on the role of the UN, and on the steps needed to implement the roadmap on Palestine.

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Ayad Allawi did poorly. A continuing US role in Iraq appeared to be unavoidable.

With the Shia coalition poised to form a government in Baghdad, the insurgency, now less concerned with Iraqi security organizations, appears to be targeting the Shias that could culminate in creating a Shia-Sunni divide that the Shia leadership has so far avoided. The US moves, that are usually coordinated with Israel, appear to be increasingly aimed at fanning religious divisions in the Middle East.

The pressure on Syria has made the Lebanese Shias rally around the government in Damascus. Iran is also coming under pressure, and while diplomacy through the Europeans is being given a chance, a resort to pre-emption directly by the US or through Israel is not being ruled out. However, if preemption is revived Syria is the likely target.

To top it all, Bush has again made a call for democratic reforms in the Muslim world, notably in the Greater Middle East stretching from Morocco to Pakistan. He clearly regards US-style democracy as the model, and the yardstick of reform, with regime-change as a threat to enforce it. The broadening of his agenda from fighting terrorism to replacing orthodox Islamic

view that the US attack on Iraq was illegal. He has been grilled as the scandal over UN role in the "oil-for-food" programme for Iraq. Many members of the ruling party in the US have called for his resignation. As was to be expected, this has made him highly submissive towards the US, over secretariat appointments and other administrative matters.

Though reassurances would be given about the desire of Mr Bush to restore the UN's proper role in his second term, Mr Bolton can be expected to use his position as ambassador to the UN to make sure that US interests and preferences are safeguarded. He can keep track of all developments and initiatives and the mere threat of the US government or Congress to limit funds or not cooperate can restrict the role of the UN.

The decision by Mr Bush to offer Iran incentives if it cooperates on its nuclear ambitions, by facilitating its entry into the WTO, and lifting the ban on spare parts for Iranian civilian aircraft of US origin, marks a more pragmatic approach. If Iran fails to comply, the matter would be placed before the Security Council to impose sanctions. Thus, both hard and soft options are being kept open while retaining US goals of global hegemony.