

Decline and fall of the United States

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ARE we about to witness the decline and fall of the United States as the sole superpower? Is the Iraq war the defining moment of this fall?

Less than a quarter of a century ago, a supremely confident Soviet Union rolled its tanks into Kabul (December 1979). Getting in was easy; getting out humiliating. The Berlin Wall fell within four years of the Soviet exit from Afghanistan. The Soviet Union died not with a bang but with a whimper.

Seen in the cool retrospect of time, Soviet adventurism in Afghanistan was hubristic and, like the Iraq invasion by the US, based on faulty intelligence fed to a hawkish politburo and a cabal of neocons respectively. The war drained the resources of the Soviets; a moribund economy was brought to its knees.

Much the same and more is happening in Iraq. Consider:

In its 80-year long history Iraq was never salvageable as a unitary state. It required a succession of terrorist military dictatorships, after the assassination of King Feisal and Nuri-el-Said, culminating in Saddam Hussein, to keep the northern Kurds, the southern majoritarian Shias and the mid-Sunni triangle together.

If the US is committed to keep Iraq as a unitary state, it must inherit the job of enforcing unity where Saddam left it, whether or not the Abu Ghraib prison is destroyed. The federal or confederative system does not work without a preceding culture of civil society (indeed, such a culture did exist in the time of

Iraqi weapons of mass destruction (WMD).

Not finding any WMD, the war aim was conveniently changed to installing civil society in Iraq. Can you think of another war where aims were changed like curtains? Who on earth has given the US the right to declare war on a sovereign state without the sanction of the UN Security Council?

The so-called clash of civilizations has its genesis in the crass injustice meted out to the Palestinians by Israel with the participation and acquiescence of the US.

American policy on Israel is mortgaged to the US Jewish voting machine. No US political aspirant at any level of office can ever hope to win an election unless this monstrous machine directly or indirectly stamps its approval.

Today, Sharon has walled in Israel exceeding the territory

consequences for Turkey, Iran and Syria (all have large Kurd minority populations). The Turkish dilemma will be either to grudgingly accept Kurdistan's quasi or complete independence or to give up its quest to join the European Union, if it resorts to force.

The Iranians would desire a Shia state in the south with at least the same elbowroom as the Kurds may extract; which leaves two huge imponderables: the Sunni triangle in the middle and the cynosure of all eyes — Kirkuk with its huge oil wealth.

Kirkuk is historically part of Kurdistan; but after the discovery of oil, the Kurds were expelled. They now demand restitution and de-Arabization. Moreover, backed by Turkey, ethnic Turkmen assert that Kirkuk is a Turkmen city, which would be Turkey's counterpoint to a possible Kurdistan. Oil wealth may prove more divisive than the Shia-Sunni divide. The Sunni triangle (now without known leaders) may join the Shia south in claiming Kirkuk for a rump Iraq state if the Kurds separate.

Rump Iraq would be the richest oil state in the world after Saudi Arabia. The US would be loath to see such an oil prize fall under the influence of the Iranian clerics. Kirkuk, therefore, lies directly on the Iraq fault line. The only way to avoid it becoming yet another perennial flashpoint in the Middle East, is for a tripartite Iraq to remain to form a true federation with complete regional autonomy for each constituent unit.

We live in a world of linkages. The central link for the Muslim world is

Most Americans express their helplessness with regard to Palestinian rights and the mindless invasion of Iraq. At most levels of society, Americans are for coexistence with moderate Islam. But, given the mortgage of its politics to the windmills of organized Jewry, this mass democracy falsely sees security tied to Israel. Muslim society sees no alternative but to confront the US at each opportunity. One hopes

kinship about 40 years back).

The handing over of legal power to an undefined Iraqi constitutional order on June 30 this year is not likely to change the combat situation on the ground. The US army, reinforced by a further force of 20,000 men in arms, will be bogged down in the centre and the south of Iraq. It is difficult to imagine a US army in Iraq taking orders from the local legal entity. Following Mao's dictum "Power grows through the barrel of a gun", the alleged transfer of sovereignty to Iraqis is merely cosmetic.

The war has cost the US at least \$150 billion so far. What with plans for manned flights to Mars, homeland security and counter-terrorism measures already in the triple digit billions (a new \$15 billion contract will monitor all foreign visitors before arrival in the United States), a perennial adverse balance of trade, with Europe today more competitive in selling America's principal export — commercial and military aircraft, the US is living beyond its means. In the last three years, the euro has climbed by approximately 35 per cent over the dollar.

The universal perception of the US today is something between a bully and a paper tiger. North Korea brandishes defiance to the US; it is offered a mountain of bounties to roll back its nuclear programme. Its anti-democratic and human rights credentials, even bleaker than Saddam's, invites no invasion.

The Iraq war is a fiasco on a par with the Soviet invasion in Afghanistan in 1979. Poor intelligence, compounded by unilateral adventurism, insults heaped on "old Europe" by the neocons, sidetracking the Security Council, the US has alienated its traditional allies, lost its traditional leadership role and intensified alienation of the Muslim world to a boiling point.

Never in the past century has the US been so utterly alone as it is today.

The US aim at the start of the Iraq war was to destroy alleged

that a truly democratic America will some day transcend this myopia and search its conscience for where it has gone wrong.

way beyond the green line sanctioned by the UN in 1967. Washington meekly protests. Is it not a case of the tail wagging the dog?

As a consequence, the US has lost its moral power as a world force — in much the same way the Soviets lost the underpinnings of Marxist morality when it colonized and enslaved Eastern Europe after World War II.

A war is the most unpredictable of all human enterprises. Who could have imagined that a single bullet assassinating the Archduke Ferdinand of Austria in 1914 would, in domino fashion, lead to World War I and the collapse of the Ottoman, Austro-Hungarian and Russian empires, and would follow on to the Russian Revolution of 1917? Who could have foreseen that Nazi Germany's aggression against Poland in 1939 would end in the overlordship of Eastern Europe by Soviet Russia in 1945, or nearer home, no soothsayer or political pundit would have staked his reputation in predicting the fall of the Soviet Union within a decade of its invasion of Afghanistan in 1979.

What are the probable consequences of an Anglo-American withdrawal from Iraq? The future is a land without any maps. Yet, the drama of real life in moving the logjam of humanity is more daring than our wildest imagination.

Firstly, the threat of a Kurdish state emerging in north Iraq is a possibility that cannot be ruled out. The Kurds have an elected parliament, two regional governments, their own court system, and a 100,000-strong military force, known as the Peshmerga. They have enjoyed US protection since the Kuwait war of 1991. A Kurdish declaration of de facto or de jure autonomy or independence will have grave

Palestine. The current situation there may be described as Shakespeare's "mad scene". Sharon appears bent on seeking revenge for the expulsion of Jews from Babylonia by enclosing the hapless Palestinians in three West Bank enclaves, which

would be similar to the White South African Bantustans; and a pogrom to expel recalcitrant Palestinians to Jordan and beyond.

The massive wall now under construction claims large parts of the West Bank for Israel in total defiance of the 1967 UN resolutions. The Palestinians have been pushed to the wall and conditions have never been so intolerable.

There is a body of minority opinion within Israel and the US, which is in revolt against this obnoxious state of affairs. President Clinton in the dying days of his administration did make an effort to find some middle ground. Since then, it has been a nosedive into a living hell.

And matters are made more complicated by Jihadi terrorism against Israeli civilian targets, which is trumped up by the Israeli hawks and religious parties to justify Israel's policy of ruthless suppression.

The Americans are a generous, friendly, caring, open-minded and democratic people. Most Americans I encounter express their helplessness with regard to Palestinian rights and the mindless invasion of Iraq. At most levels of society, Americans are for coexistence with moderate Islam.

But, given the mortgage of its politics to the windmills of organized Jewry, this mass democracy falsely sees security tied to Israel. Muslim society sees no alternative but to confront the US at each opportunity. One hopes that a truly democratic America will some day transcend this myopia and search its conscience for where it has gone wrong.

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