



If Kerry wins...

BY HAMID ALVI USA 2/11/04 *The Nation*

With the exception of the American civil war, the American electorate has never been so bitterly divided as it is in the current battle for the presidency scheduled to be concluded in the next twenty-four hours.

Not only is the race bitter, neck and neck, keen edged, and almost razor-sharp, but it has evolved around a single issue – the war in Iraq. Polls taken just a week back showed that forty five percent of the American electorate love George Bush and an equal number loath him. The ten percent who were undecided are going to make the difference as the polling opens on Tuesday, November 2.

Despite the critical vulnerability of George Bush on the issue of Iraq, John Kerry, for much of the campaign, was a reluctant exploiter of that issue. Around the time of the first debate, the mounting public pressure apparently pushed him into it. The Americans are feeling the pinch from the decision to invade Iraq. Kerry had to take a clear-cut stand against the war and its author if he wanted a majority of the Americans to vote for him.

In more than one respect, the American election is all about war and its related policies. Granting Bush a second term will be an endorsement of the war, as voting Kerry into the White House will be a manifest rejection of the war. Kerry's election, therefore, will be more of a vote against the President than a vote for the Senator. John Kerry, however, is duty

ism perpetrated by Israel, one of the closest allies of the US, is largely breeding and fuelling terrorism.

Unless Palestine is resolved, public diplomacy and the economic power of the US is unlikely to succeed in reversing the wave of terrorism and hatred of the US found in Islamic countries. It is a pity that American leaders and scholars who won the cold war believing in a cause and effect view of the movement of history in contrast to the Marxian concept, are unwilling to apply that view to understand and explain the rise of terrorism.

Having promised to withdraw US troops from Iraq "faster than Bush", Kerry's "haste" in the matter, however, does not match that of the American public. He talks in terms of one to two years. This kind of timetable for withdrawal will certainly lead to a Vietnam-type student rebellion jeopardizing Kerry's second term.

What ultimately happens in Iraq is certainly of interest to the people of Pakistan. But of greater interest to them are Kerry's likely policies towards their own country, towards Afghanistan and regarding the peace process in progress between India and Pakistan. Pak-US relations, which were at an all-time low following Nawaz Sharif's decision to carry out nuclear explosions and his subsequent ouster from power, were suddenly revived after 9/11.

What forced the US reversal was the realization at the Bush White House that it could not wage a

bound to implement the Democratic Party platform, as well as the commitments he made to the electorate during the hectic campaign.

First of all the world as well as the US public will expect Kerry to call off what Kofi Anan calls an illegal war in Iraq. Kerry proclaimed his agreement with all opponents of the war when he told Time magazine on September 20, 2004, that the 9/11 commission makes it clear that "Saddam Hussain had nothing to do with 9/11 and nothing to do with al-Qaeda. The war was against al-Qaeda and for getting justice for 9/11. George Bush diverted the focus from Afghanistan; and we are spending \$200 billion on the war in Iraq".

How will Kerry replace war with peace without hurting American pride, the prestige of the world's only superpower, and above all, without defeating terrorism, are the major questions bothering America and the rest of the world. Furthermore, American's adventure in Iraq and the resultant debacle are organically connected with the alienation of the Muslim world from the US and, presumably, one cannot be rectified without correcting the other.

Kerry does not seem to have specific proposals to pull the US out of the fiasco his rival has created. He however, does have some general ideas. In the interview referred to above, Kerry offers solutions by putting in play America's economic power, its values and principles and by activating public diplomacy.

In contrast to Bush's unilateralism, he would like to make use of the United Nations and mend fences with America's European allies. He suggests calling an international conference to formulate a mechanism that would transform Iraq from a shattered nation to a peaceful and democratic society.

To inject warmth and trust in relations with the Muslim nations and eradicate extremism, Kerry again resorts to generalities. Through America's economic power and public diplomacy he intends to isolate extremists instead of giving them a chance to isolate America. Towards that end, Kerry proposes a dialogue with moderate Islamic leaders to identify extremists and work out means to restore the legitimacy of Islam in his country.

In total disregard of the wishes of Muslim leaders and of the public in Muslim states, Kerry makes no promise to look into the root causes of the rise of terrorism. An honest observer, Muslim or non-Muslim, has no problem in understanding that the dispute over Palestine, where Muslims are mercilessly killed daily through state terror-

war in Afghanistan without Pakistan's support. To Kerry, it should be crystal clear that he cannot win the peace in Afghanistan without Pakistan's assistance.

And peace in Afghanistan means stabilizing Karzai's government, resolving ethnic conflicts, and eliminating remnants of Taliban and al-Qaeda. These tasks are far from complete and the US will continue to need Pakistan, maybe for years, to achieve its objectives in Afghanistan. Hence no change in US policy towards Pakistan is expected.

As regards the Indo-Pakistan peace process, Secretary Powell recently counted it as one of the foreign policy accomplishments of the Bush administration. Needless to say, the peace process hinges on the US sponsored war on terrorism. Because of the latter, the American interest will continue in the former.

Therefore, the US will not be able to abandon the peace process unless it is ready to forego the war against terror. Like their co-religionists at home, the Muslims living in the United States are also expected to benefit from the victory of John Kerry. Their organizations, such as the American Muslim Task Force on Civil Rights, complained last week that the Bush administration has been insensitive to their civil liberties and human rights, and asked Muslims to vote for Kerry. They might have been given some assurances for a better deal by the Kerry camp to win them over.

Finally, a Kerry victory should have a major impact on American relations with its European allies. The estrangement between the two has been caused by George Bush's Iraq policy which, for the last several weeks, has been under constant criticism of the Democratic candidate. The latter would like Europe back in the fold knowing that an overall Mideast peace will remain illusive without European participation.

Finally, a Kerry victory in all probability may help change for better the complexion of US politics. The Republican rule under Bush has fortified the extreme right wing forces in the country. Moving from behind the scene activities to open assertion of their views has created a situation resembling ideological conflict between the two parties. So much so that President Bush, a prominent product of American conservatism, has been calling Kerry a "lefty" or a socialist. Long after the demise of the Soviet Union, the neo-cons calling their liberal opponents "lefties" is a bad omen for American democracy. If Kerry wins the American presidency, a dangerous conservative trend in American politics may be halted from proceeding further.