

USA Daily Times

# America's assignment —



1-11-09

By Henry A Kissinger

*The newly elected US president will have to lead an effort to define and then maintain an international system that reflects the new, revolutionary circumstances.*

AS these lines are being written, the election process is still in full swing. But this week, barring another deadlocked outcome the campaign that has mesmerised America will be over. What will remain are the challenges that gave rise to this occasionally frenzied battle and the responsibility of dealing with them. No president has faced an agenda of comparable scope. This is not hyperbole; it is the hand history we have dealt this generation. Never before has it been necessary to conduct a war with neither front lines nor geographic definition and, at the same time, to rebuild fundamental principles of world order to replace the traditional ones which went up in the smoke of the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon.

The newly elected president's task is perhaps most analogous to that inherited by President Truman at the end of the Second World War. In 1945, the Soviet Union was emerging as a threat to the global equilibrium, while the war had left a vacuum in Central Europe. But the Soviet challenge was concrete and geographical — definable. Today's principal threats are abstract and mobile. Terror has no fixed address; it has attacked from Bali to Singapore, Riyadh, Istanbul, Moscow, Madrid, Tunis, New York and Washington. In the 1940s, the solution to the crisis was straightforward, albeit difficult: to construct a defensive line in the centre of Europe and an economic programme to close the gap between public expectation and the reality of shortages that threatened domestic stability.

The contemporary security challenge arises from two unprecedented sources: terror caused by

acts until recently considered a matter for internal police forces rather than international policy, and scientific advances and proliferation that allow the survival of countries to be threatened by developments entirely within another state's territory. Truman could take the legitimacy of the international system for granted; the Atlantic alliance rallied America's West European allies from the Second World War. The newly elected president will have to lead an effort to define and then maintain an international system that reflects the new, revolutionary circumstances.

I supported President Bush during the campaign and hope for his success. But whatever the outcome, the United States cannot tackle this agenda except in the context of a commitment by all sides to healing. All concerned with the future of the country must find ways to cooperate so that the world will again see Americans working toward a common destiny both at home and in the community of nations. It is to such an effort that this article seeks to make a contribution.

No issue requires bipartisan support more urgently than the next phase of Iraq policy. If President Bush prevails, it is important that America's adversaries not confuse the passion of an election period with lack of unity regarding ultimate goals. If Senator Kerry wins, there is an overwhelming need for immediate cooperation between the incoming and the outgoing administration, lest the rhetoric describing the war as unnecessary at the wrong place, coupled with the hiatus imposed by the months of transition, undermine the confidence of the Iraqi authorities and cause a collapse before the new team can even begin to chart a course.

The seeming agreement on at least immediate objectives between the candidates was reflected in their endorsement of the 9/11 Commission Report, which pointed out that terrorism is a method, not a policy. The basic adversary is the radical, fundamentalist militant fringe of Islam, which aims to overthrow both moderate Islamic societies and all others it perceives as standing in the way of restoring an Islamic caliphate. For that reason, many societies that

questioned America's intervention nevertheless have a stake in a successful outcome. If a radical government emerges in Baghdad — because the United States is defeated or tires of solitary exertions, even more if Iraq falls into terrorist chaos — the entire Islamic world will find itself in turmoil. Moderate governments will topple or struggle for their existence; countries with substantial Islamic minorities, such as India, Russia and the Philippines, will witness a mounting challenge. Terrorism will spread across Europe. The challenges to America will multiply.

Today the US acts as the trustee of glob-

It is important for the US to democracy in Iraq — a society divisions — where minority st discrimination and the constant January elections in Iraq, there beginning of an extended conte involving the constant risk of civ against the US, or both. It will national electoral process w federalism and to establish clea for those who might find themse

al stability, while domestic obstacles prevent the admission — and perhaps even the recognition — of these realities in many countries. But such a one-sided arrangement cannot continue much longer. Other nations should find it in their interest to participate at least in the tasks of political and economic reconstruction. There is no shortcut around the next steps: the restoration of security in Iraq, especially in areas that have become terrorist sanctuaries, is imperative. No guerrilla war can be won if sanctuaries for insurgents are tolerated.

Having witnessed the challenges of creating local security forces in Indochina, I would warn against approaching the security effort in too mechanical a manner. In Vietnam, it took far longer to make units ready for combat than simply fulfilling the requirements of a training

# - global challenges ahead

manual. The effectiveness of Iraqi forces will depend not only on their military training but also on the degree to which the emerging Iraqi institutions gain domestic legitimacy. Units without political allegiance are generally least reliable when most needed.

The first national elections scheduled for the end of January are the next step. They should be viewed not as a culmination but as the first and perhaps least complicated achievement in the quest for Iraqi self-government. Democracy in the West evolved over centuries. It required first a church independent of the state; then the

to understand the obstacles to  
ty with distinct ethnic or political  
status often means permanent  
nt risk of political extinction. The  
efore, must be regarded as the  
ntest among the various groups,  
civil war, or of a national struggle  
ill be necessary to augment the  
with a significant element of  
ear-cut constitutional protections  
selves in the permanent minority

Reformation, which imposed pluralism of religion; the Enlightenment, which asserted the autonomy of reason from both church and state; the Age of Discovery, which broadened horizons; and finally capitalism, with its emphasis on competition and the market. None of these conditions exists in the Islamic world. Instead there is a merging of religion and politics inimical to pluralism. A genuine democratic government has come about only in Turkey, paradoxically through the imposition of democratic forms by an autocratic leader. The emergence of democratic institutions and of the arrangements which hold them together cannot be engineered as an act of will; it requires patience and modesty.

It is particularly important to understand the obstacles to democracy in a multiethnic and multi-religion society such as Iraq's. In the West, democracy evolved in homogeneous societies.

There was no institutional impediment to the minority's becoming a majority. Electoral defeat was considered a temporary setback that could be reversed. But in societies with distinct ethnic or political divisions, minority status often means permanent discrimination and the constant risk of political extinction.

This is a particularly acute issue in Iraq. The country is composed of three major groups: Kurds, Shias, and Sunnis, with the Shias representing about 60 percent of the population and the other two groups about 20 percent each. For 500 years, the Sunnis have dominated by military force and, during Saddam's rule, with extraordinary brutality. Thus national elections, based on majority rule, imply a radical upheaval in the relative power and status of the three communities. The insurgency in the Sunni region is not only a national struggle against America; it is a means to restore political dominance. By the same token, the political process means little for the Kurds if it does not ensure a large measure of autonomy. The Shias tolerate the US presence — sometimes ambivalently — to achieve the goal of reversing the historic pattern of Sunni rule and as a first step to Shia dominance. To what extent they will continue to support our role as the transfer of power progresses remains to be seen.

The January elections in Iraq, therefore, must be regarded as the beginning of an extended contest among the various groups, involving the constant risk of civil war, or of a national struggle against the US, or both. All factions maintain militias for precisely such eventualities. It will be necessary to augment the national electoral process with a significant element of federalism and to establish clear-cut constitutional protections for those who might find themselves in the permanent minority. Democracy must not be seen as a suicide pact by the Sunnis and the Kurds. Federalist structures and the assurance that free speech, freedom of conscience, and due process of law are constitutionally

beyond the reach of any majority might provide some guarantee for the concerns of the various groups and a safety net if national reconciliation proves impossible.

In the potential cauldron after the January elections, some degree of internationalisation is the only realistic path toward stability inside Iraq and sustained domestic support in America. The survival of the political process depends in the first instance on security—for which the United States retains the major responsibility — but ultimately on international acceptance to enable the Iraqi government to be perceived as representing indigenous aspirations.

During the political campaign there has been much talk of beginning this process with an effort to induce our European allies to increase their military participation and to lure recalcitrant allies into joining the security effort. Such a course cannot succeed in a time frame relevant to the immediate necessities. Germany and France — the two most difficult allies on Iraq — will not reverse their stand in sending troops to Iraq at the beginning of a process of reconciliation. (The German Foreign Minister has said so explicitly). And countries that have sent troops have enough domestic difficulties maintaining their participation and little, if any, scope for increasing it.

Meaningful internationalisation requires a focus other than security and the participation of countries other than — or in addition to — NATO. After the January elections, an international contact group, under UN auspices, to advise on Iraq's political evolution is therefore desirable. Logical members would be countries that have experience with militant Islam as much to lose by the radicalisation of Iraq — countries such as India, Turkey, Russia, Algeria, in addition to the United States and Britain. This is not an abdication to consensus. The United States, by virtue of its military presence and financial role, would retain the leading position. The issue of military contribution by other nations, including NATO, can be raised again at a later stage in a more favourable political environment as a means to protect the governmental process. **COURTESY NEWSWEEK**

*The writer was former US secretary of state*

*This is the first article of a three-part series*