

As Bush wins, America

George W. Bush has won the forty-fourth presidential race in the United States in a vote count that surpassed every other in the past.

The electoral campaign, long and excruciating, more negative than positive, punctuated with images of animals representing the political leadership, occasional fist fights and a plethora of insinuations, did somewhat tarnish the race to the White House. However, it all ended well thanks to a timely call from Senator Kerry to President Bush graciously conceding him victory and the latter rightly describing Kerry as "an honourable and worthy opponent".

The most significant part of their conversation included Senator Kerry telling him, "today the nation is divided", and President Bush agreed with him instantly. While it has to be seen what the President would do to heal the wounds of a bitterly divided nation, he has been assured support from Kerry to reunite it.

On the eve of the elections, many in the media had given a clear edge to Kerry. Scores of analysts had also predicted that the election and its result would be marred by insinuations and litigation much worse than in 2000, when Bush had managed to steal the show by outmanoeuvring Al-Gore. This time, however, it turned out to be much better, although at one stage it looked as if history was likely to be repeated in Ohio.

Calculations by Democrats did not add up to their expected magical numbers and the 3.5 million more votes to Bush made his victory phenomenal. Not only that, the November 2 polls added gave an added majority to the Republicans in the Senate and the House of Representatives, besides giving them more governors.

It would be wrong for Bush to listen to his neo-cons and consider his electoral victory as a vindication of his policies. He needs to understand that Kerry, except for his emphasis on his economic agenda, was neither here nor there on matters of foreign policy. His projection of himself as a Vietnam War hero must have disenchanted those middle aged American voters who had spearheaded a sustained anti-Vietnam war campaign in the seventies. Kerry did not realize that by bringing out his Vietnam career, he had revived the bitter memories and pricked the wounds of those who to this day suffer from Vietnam War syndrome.

The vote for President Bush was not a vindication of his war mongering policies. Kerry did manage to sound concerned about national security when he raised his voice regarding the misgivings of the American people about the conduct of the war in Iraq. Had he come out more forcefully and clearly against the blatant invasion of Iraq, it would be he and

not Bush who would have won the election. Instead of freeing the American mind-set of the fear psychosis that underscored the need for a "strong, unbending and uncompromising war-time" President masterly created by Bush and his team of neo-cons, Kerry got caught in the trap laid by them.

By all estimates, Bush was not the better leader; people voted for him only because he was their local goon, who would protect them from outsiders. They clearly supported his hard-line, tough and single-minded response to the challenge of global terrorism and chose to give him the benefit of the doubt about the flawed reasons and fabricated lies conjured by the neo-cons to justify his war on Iraq. The election results proved that they had rightly assessed that it would be 9/11 that would decide who would be the 44th President. Simply put, the American voters showed their preference to vote for the devil they knew rather than the one they didn't.

Some analysts believe that the second Bush administration would be different; much sober and a good deal less aggressive. It will try to devote most of its energy to building a sound legacy and repairing and reviving the country's shattered economy. He will try to usher in changes of far-reaching consequences, especially in the conduct of American foreign policy. Instead of killing the patient, he would try to cure the disease by getting onto his road map for peace in the Middle East as indicated by him in his victory address. He shall have to cease to be the body that is wagged by the Israeli tail.

Holding a contrary view to this are those who see in the second term Bush an elephant drunk with unbridled power. Everything that would come in his way would get trampled. These experts feel that the neo-cons holding Bush as a hostage would want to convince or even force him through circumstances including planted tapes of Osama Bin Laden, Ayman Al-Zawahiri and Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi to go berserk. Having tasted blood in Iraq and Afghanistan as the dividend of the policy of their illegitimate aggression and confrontation, Bush and Co. would continue pursuing their unilateralist, self-righteous and hard-line policies.

The Bush victory has been described as one of the most rare and astounding political feats in modern history. His father, the senior Bush, went to war with Iraq and got Kuwait freed from Saddam Hussain's stranglehold, but lost the second term presidential race to Bill Clinton. Never before in the past could any incumbent in the White House have survived such a rich catalogue of crimes against hu-

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manity, illegal wars and total failure on the domestic front.

His critics place him on the highest pedestal among those American leaders who have been responsible for giving a bad name to the otherwise most dynamic multi-cultural nation in the world. According to them Bush would walk away with the honours at any time for pursuing policies that have been disastrous for the United States and the world. They believe that the American electorate voted for Bush out of sheer isolationist desperation and not because the masses lack moral values or suffer from arrogance of imperial power.

Though closely fought until the die was cast finally on November 2, a Bush victory was no doubt imminent. It was no surprise for the American people but it definitely stunned the rest of the world. His policies and politics have definitely divided the nation and the United States; 51 per cent were on Bush's side while the remaining 49 per cent opposed him.

Never before in history has public opinion in the world been so compartmentalized as it is now. Invariably, people from virtually every continent have spoken out vehemently against him. Professional surveys conducted in Europe said that 75 per cent of the masses opposed Bush. Sixty eight per cent of the population in Tony Blair's United Kingdom hates Bush and did not want him to be the President again. In the rest of the world too, resentment against Bush has been enormous. In his friend Musharraf's Pakistan, he is hated on two counts. Firstly, for his anti-Islamic bias and secondly for supporting a military dictator.

For some nations American policies are awe-inspiring while for others they are fearsome and purely imperialistic. Leaders like Bush have buried deep higher ideals such as making the world safe for democracy and sacrificed them at the altar of their own geo-political strategic interests by showing preference for dictatorship. His victory would give comfort to dictators all over the world; even Saddam in his cell should look forward to his return to help him regain control of Iraq once again.

There could not be a more blatant betrayal of the cause of democracy than what we are witnessing in Pakistan. Just a little before 9/11, Pakistan's military dictator, General

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The Nation

Pervez Musharraf, was considered as a pariah in the democratic comity of nations, including the United States, which had even imposed sanctions against Pakistan. After 9/11, President Bush's priorities changed when Musharraf responded positively - hands folded, back stooping to the ground - to Washington's ultimatum to him that "You're either with us or with them".

There could not be a more horrendous case of hypocrisy and double standards when President Bush called him his most trusted friend. This about a military dictator who has been cheating the world by putting on a transparent civilian fig leaf to cover up his immodesty of being a military ruler with the worst possible human rights record. Bush will have to come up with better logic than justifying closing down of democratic societies in the name of protecting them.

Following his war on Iraq on the ill-founded pretext that Saddam had weapons of mass destruction and finding none, Bush has been crying hoarse that he had gone to Iraq to give its people democracy and freedom. His lips have been found moving faster than his words in seeking the establishment of democracy in the Middle East while ignoring Pakistan and some of his other friends. Does it make any sense to attack countries like Iran and North Korea for their lack of democracy but to let Musharraf walk scot-free? If democracy is to be encouraged, then it must be encouraged everywhere and at all times, and not just when and where it suits US interests. Previous American administrations have also provided succour to military dictators in Pakistan. From Eisenhower to Nixon to Reagan, they all chose to sacrifice democracy at the expense of their perceived geo-strategic interests. In the process, they did irreparable damage to the political and social fabric of Pakistan and helped to prevent the growth of a truly democratic culture in the country. Bush is committing the same mistake.

Analysts have warned that in his second term, with neo-cons taking an even firmer hold over him, Bush would be like a bull in a China shop. He is not likely to start wearing clerical robes but his religious attitude would become more lethal than his politics and a clash of civilisations cannot be ruled out.

Those who are more pessimistic believe that his second term would be a disaster for the world and his future wars would be a total war against the world itself. They feel that the Americans, by voting for him, have endorsed the destruction of international law, the United Nations Charter and universally accepted conventions, vindi-

cated the illegal war on Iraq and condoned the violation of the rights of prisoners of war (Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay). They fear that his new targets would be Iran, Syria, North Korea, China and Cuba. Pakistan would be taught a lesson if it does not roll back its nuclear programme and hand over its nuclear icon, Dr Abdul Qadeer Khan, to the Americans to be made a horrible example. Rumours are afloat that neo-cons have been working overtime to fabricate dossiers based justify future actions against the targeted nations.

Not that one has sympathy for Kerry, but what made him different from Bush was his multilateral approach to seeking solutions to global problems. He was opposed to using Bush's shortsighted and destructive policies. He pledged to resolve issues on the basis of right is might and not vice versa. He believed that such methods eventually create more chaos and anarchy. One also agrees with the view that Bush's policies and solutions provide strength to movements and forces that propel terrorism and make leaders out of Osama Bin Laden, Ayman Al-Zawahiri, Mulla Omar and Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi.

Secure in his second term in office, Bush will have to do something drastic to secure a legacy for himself that would do justice to the great American nation that has a glorious past record rich in commitment to higher human values of freedom and democracy. He must not consider reelection as payment of 'services' rendered in his first tenure. Rather, it is more of an overdraft to him to reform his image through humanitarian policies rather than as the destroyer of all that the American nation once stood for. He will have to surrender to the will of the United Nations and be subservient to the international opinion as witnessed in the worldwide street opposition to his arbitrary invasion of Iraq and his perpetration of injustices on the people of Palestine.

In countries like Pakistan and the rest of the Muslim world, the masses have been angry at his previous policies. He will have to change them to win over the Muslims. No doubt his support to President Musharraf would earn the General personal dividends but it will add to Bush's unpopularity and hatred for the American nation as a whole. He must tell his friend that enough is enough and should ask him to make room for genuine democracy. Bush should earn the love of the Pakistani people by becoming their friend and not their master. It is hoped that in his second term he would realize that a democratic Pakistan can more effectively fight and eliminate terrorism than a military dictator who sustains himself by running with the American hare and hunting with the Jihadi hounds.