

Some changes likely in US policies

USA
13/11/04

By Maqbool Ahmad Bhatti

THE re-election of President George W. Bush for a second term has not gone down well internationally, since his arrogance, and unilateralism, on the basis of America's military predominance had alienated informed public opinion in most parts of the world. It is necessary, however, to look into the causes of his victory, when most of the intellectual establishment in the US also disapproved of his style and direction.

In the assessments made immediately after his re-election, his success has been attributed to two factors. First, he had exploited the trauma that has persisted in the US since the 9/11 attack, which was the first major aggression against the US mainland. Bush and the neocons around him continued to play on the fear factor, by painting a scary picture of the threat posed by Islamic extremists.

The terrorist incidents that punctuated the three years since 9/11 confirmed the fears, and public opinion within the US remained supportive of Bush as a leader who had performed well in the war against terrorism. The security alerts announced from time to time helped to maintain the scare, and the average American gave Bush a high rating in his handling of the war against terror.

The second factor,

municating with friends and allies before taking decisions that affect them. One would hope that the influence of neo-conservatives, who are guiding American foreign policy, will gradually go down. One would have to wait for the changes he makes in his cabinet to see whom he leaves out. Defence Secretary Rumsfeld is expected to be a likely dropout, owing to the Abu Ghraib prison scandal in Iraq.

Some US analysts expect the influence of the elder Bush to grow, because a large number of commentators wrote about his restraint and cooperation with allies. Having won a second term, unlike his father, the younger Bush may be more concerned now with his place in history. He was asked specifically about his reaction to the statement by Prime Minister Tony Blair of Britain, that the most urgent problem to address was that of Palestine. He reiterated

and some of them have been utilized in the Fallujah operation. Bush would like to withdraw the bulk of US forces from Iraq over the next year or so, in the expectation that the UN-supervised elections would be followed by the arrival of forces from Islamic and other countries such as India, to back up reconstruction activity under UN management.

Will the Bush doctrine of pre-emption continue as the main strategy in the war against terror? While he is unlikely to renounce it formally, there is a general expectation that Bush would now use a combination of threats and pressure through the UN, instead of acting unilaterally. The operations against Al Qaeda will continue, and US involvement in Afghanistan is likely to persist, with increased attention to reconstruction once Karzai is formally installed. Operations against warlords may be stepped up.

There are likely to be some far-reaching changes in Bush's domestic policy that would show recognition of certain weaknesses during the first term. For instance, efforts to bring down the budgetary deficit and to prevent outsourcing of jobs to other countries are likely to have a high priority. According to the latest figures, the jobless rate went up, as a much larger number

What will be the impact of the Bush victory on US-Pakistan relations? During his first term, the government of President Pervez Musharraf has not only established a good equation with his administration, but has won high praise for the resolve displayed in apprehending terrorists, including the operation launched in the tribal area. Implementation of various agreements will, therefore, continue as before particularly in case of the economic package of three billion dollars and the supply of military equipment. The US role in backing the resumed dialogue between Pakistan and India will also continue.

While there is a bright

which was perhaps decisive in his election, was the support he enjoyed from hard-core Christians. During his first term, he had adopted positions on some key issues that polarized opinion within the country. His position on the question of abortion was based on the Christian dogma of right to life. On the issue of gay marriages, he took a firm stand against same sex marriage, as well as on the amendment the liberals advocated in the Constitution, to legalize gay marriages. On the first issue, he won the firm support of evangelical Christians, while there was widespread support from the Catholics on the issue of gay marriages.

In his post-election press conference, he claimed that the electorate had given him a vote of confidence on his domestic and foreign policies. Does this mean that his policies during the second term would be a continuation of those he had followed during his first term? If he has registered the strength of popular feeling against the war on Iraq, or taken cognizance of the growing isolation of a unilateralist America in the world, he may well make some adjustments in his policies during his second term. There are likely to be some far-reaching changes in his domestic policy that would show recognition of certain weaknesses during the first term. For instance, efforts to bring down the budgetary deficit and to prevent outsourcing of jobs to other countries are likely to have a high priority. Though the latest figures for job creation, 337,000 additional openings, are considered to be highly encouraging, the jobless rate went up, as a much larger number of candidates for employment entered the job market. Similarly, a stricter watch will be kept over the budget, one means to affect economies being to reduce the number of troops deployed abroad. This also may mean lower recourse to pre-emption.

For the rest of the world, the subject of direct interest will be his foreign policy. By now, he has had four years of experience, and maybe ready to make some changes of style, if not of substance. He has already announced his intention of com-

of candidates for employment entered the job market.

his commitment to a two-state solution, and to create a viable Palestinian state. Washington would have to exert considerable pressure on Sharon, instead of backing him. The end of the Arafat era may facilitate a more pro-active role by the US to implement the roadmap.

It has been constantly stressed by Muslim intellectuals that the underlying cause of the hostility towards the US in the Islamic world is the total support extended by Washington to Israel, even when extremists like Ariel Sharon have adopted unreasonable and aggressive policies. Eisenhower was the last president who adopted a fair and principled position, when he disapproved of the 1956 Anglo-French Aggression, together with Israel against Egypt, following Nasser's nationalization of the Suez Canal. Since then, the Zionist lobby in the US has established such a firm grip through the America-Israel Political Action Committee (AIPAC) that there has been total political and military backing to the Jewish state.

The position of the Palestinians has been constantly eroded, and Israel has progressively expanded its settlements, and violated accords reached even with US backing, such as at Madrid in 1993, and Oslo three years later. The roadmap proposed by Bush in 2002 lies in tatters, as Israel has annexed some 15 per cent of the West Bank by building the so-called security fence. The current Intifada by the Palestinians was a direct consequence of Sharon's arrogant sacrilege of the Al Aqsa mosque in 1999. The most effective way to fight "terrorism" which for the Palestinians is a struggle for their rights guaranteed in UN resolutions is to enforce a just and fair settlement of the Arab-Israeli dispute.

Bush is expected to persevere in pacifying Iraq, to enable elections in January 2005. A major operation has been launched against the forces controlling Fallujah. Some 125,000 Iraqis are being trained to take over the main responsibility for security,

outlook for government-to-government relations with the US, the popular feeling in Pakistan is following the same pattern as in

most other Islamic countries. There is resentment against the total US support to Israel even in its use of brute force and violation of human rights. If Bush does use his influence to promote a fair settlement in Palestine, the US image will improve. The US role on the Kashmir issue, when it comes up for substantive discussion, will also influence public opinion in Pakistan.

The overall impact of the first four years of Bush was negative, on account of his unilateralism, arrogance and virtual contempt for the UN, on the basis of the overwhelming military superiority and economic clout of the sole superpower. He is aware that the US has a serious image problem, and even close allies including European countries disown both the style and substance of his administration. Though Tony Blair has remained faithful, over 80 per cent of the British people disapprove of Bush. The veteran Chinese statesman, and former deputy prime minister, Qien Qichen, was openly critical of the war against Iraq that had adversely affected the global security environment.

Taking all this into account, and the remarks the jubilant victor made in his first press conference after re-election, there is hope that he will seek to project a softer image of the sole superpower. He pledged to advance the cause of democracy, which he believes is the best antidote to terrorism. He also promised to maintain closer interaction with friends and allies. While the continuing fear and insecurity created by the 9/11 attack require deterrent action against terrorism, the real antidote to extremism and violence is to address injustice, both political and economic.

The values the US championed after the Second World War, and specially the role envisaged for the UN hold the key to peace and development in the world as a whole. Bush has the challenge, as well as the opportunity, to make a correction in the role of the world's most powerful country.