

# Living with the Republicans

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8/11/04 By Anwer Mooraj USA

THE American presidential election has given the world another four years of President Bush. The victory margin was relatively slim, indicating a deeply divided nation. But it was sufficient to declare a winner.

The outcome was not altogether unexpected. In fact, two *Economist* journalists, John Micklethwait and Adrian Wooldridge, in their book published earlier this year, *The Right Nation: Why America is different*, had pointed out that those hoping that a John Kerry victory in November would halt the onward rush of conservative triumphalism in America were fooling themselves.

They stated that Bush's "accidental" victory in 2000 may come to be seen as the beginning of a prolonged period of Republican dominance and that the Democratic party, bereft of policy ideas, disorganized and permanently on the defensive, was reduced to being the anti-Bush party. The Democrats will, of course, do their post-mortem in the next few months to find out where they had gone wrong.

John Kerry's ideas, to be precise, were too liberal for an American public that had developed a refined propellant conservatism. The Republicans had over the years successfully cultivated Christian fundamentalism to the extent that they were able to create a mass base for reaction and militarism. And — this is the hard part no Democrat wants to readily admit — Kerry just lacked warmth and charisma. Many of the people with whom he came into contact found him slightly aloof and distant.

Bush, on the other hand, exuded warmth and what passes for sincerity in the Bible belt. In parts of Texas, he scooped the audience into his pocket by simply being on stage. He had a one-point agenda, keeping America safe, and he circulated this with all the authority of scripture. He was able to harness the Evangelical Christian vote by playing on the fears and insecurities of a confused electorate that was led to believe that the terrorists were out to get them, and that the only people capable of

United States is using the Peoples Republic of China to discipline them.

In Pakistan the reaction in Islamabad has been in sharp contrast to the reaction in Peshawar, where there is deep resentment against the unprovoked attacks by the Americans against the Taliban in Afghanistan and on the NWFP border.

Then, there was a common belief that Bush is good for Pakistan and Kerry is good for India. It was as simple as that. Most people in this country from the *patwari* in Toba Tek Singh to the fruit seller in Matiari believed it. And so the perception developed that the future of President Musharraf was inextricably linked to President Bush being returned for a second term.

However, a large number of Pakistanis don't see things quite the same way as the ruling clique and the turncoats in Islamabad. They do not have a kind word for either the Republican leader or the American people, which includes the Democrats who eventually supported the strike on Iraq.

How is it, they ask, that a nation that prides itself on its Christian principles and moralistic values that preach peace and brotherhood, a nation that once censured President Clinton for his "inappropriate encounters," condones the indiscriminate bombing of men, women and children in Afghanistan and Iraq, which left over a hundred thousand civilians dead on the streets of Baghdad, Fallujah and Ramadi?

In spite of what President Bush is likely to say about his future strategy, the Muslims of the world will continue to treat the war against terrorism as a euphemism for the war against Islam. The more Iraqis the Americans soldiers kill, the more they will stiffen the resistance.

Pakistanis are also a nation of cynics. No sooner had John Kerry thrown in the towel, the conspiracy theories began. The most amusing is the one about the election being rigged by the FBI and the CIA to ensure that the colossal investment that the Texas oil companies

defending them were the Republicans.

This is being increasingly regarded by the intelligentsia with leftist leanings both in the United States and elsewhere, as being totally inconsistent with the secular foundations of the United States which has always believed in an open society. This was in direct contrast to Kerry's broader agenda, which not only contained a number of inherent contradictions, but also covered so many domestic issues, that it eventually lost focus. There is absolutely no doubt in anybody's mind that had the Democratic party been represented by somebody like Bill Clinton instead of John Kerry, the White House would have had a new occupant.

In fact, if there had not been a constitutional bar on a third term, there is every likelihood Bill Clinton would have continued in office. Such was his popularity.

The election can hardly be regarded as a popular endorsement of the policies of the Bush administration. There is already criticism of the retrogressive corporate and financial oligarchy behind President Bush, with its tunnel vision, and its own reactionary agenda, which is beginning to remind critics of the clandestine activities of the United Fruit Company in Central America.

It is also not clear what the Republicans, who have now been given a new lease of life, propose to do about creating new jobs, the deepening economic crisis, the weakening dollar and the soaring national debt caused by squandering the budget surplus that Bill Clinton had hoarded "under the national mattress." It is imperative that America reaches out to Europe and adopts a policy of multi-lateralism. But so far there has been no indication of change in style or policy.

Bush's victory has not been favourably received in parts of Europe, particularly France and Germany, two countries which were in the forefront of the opposition to the invasion of Iraq. While the president and the chancellor have, nevertheless, sent congratulatory messages to the Republican leader, both CNN and the BBC have demonstrated in random interviews that the verdict of the American people has not been a popular one.

Even in England, where a large opposition had developed against American chauvinism, there are many people who would have liked to have seen Kerry elected as president. The North Koreans were also not too happy when they got the news, and resent the way the

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have made in Mesopotamia is protected. The other theory, which is a little more sinister, is the one about President Bush storing in the top drawer of his desk in the White House, an F.I.R. against the Pakistani government for being a nuclear power, which he is going to action after he has sorted out Iran, Syria and North Korea.

Meanwhile, the government in Islamabad looks complacent. It is business as usual. Sheikh Rashid continues to spew out prophetic words of wisdom, while the television cameraman hangs on to his every word, and the people who handle donations from abroad are once again laughing all the way to the bank. Things have never looked better.

Development aid which involves taking money from poor people in rich countries and giving it to rich people in poor countries, will continue unabated. One is not sure if Condoleezza Rice, who is the new rising star in the Bush firmament, and who will certainly have a say in the amount of largesse that is directed to this country, has read Francis Fukuyama's eminently readable book *State Building: Governance and World Order in the 21st Century*. In case she hasn't, I would strongly recommend she does, especially the passage about strong states not being an end in themselves, particularly when — as in so much of the non-western world — it is simply a vehicle for tribal or clientelist pilfering.

It is time the western donors expended a little effort in determining how their money is spent. If they stand back, as they have done in the past, and rely on economic conditionality, by tying aid to certain public sector reforms, they will provide irresponsible and unscrupulous local elites with a pretext for cutting back on basic infra-structure in education, health and roads. The resulting misery is then blamed on international financial institutions, while the ability of these elites to line their own pockets remains unabated.

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