

Bush's second-term agenda

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USA

PRESIDENT Bush's decisive victory in the presidential election should be seen as more than a mere electoral triumph — it indicates that the US is moving steadily to the right.

This time Mr Bush did what he had failed to do four years ago: win the popular vote, and that too by a 3.5 million margin. Actually, he achieved what no one had managed to do since his father's election in 1988, winning more than 50 per cent of the vote. The scope of his victory and its implications for both America and the world should not be underestimated.

Under his leadership, the Republican Party has gained clear control of both the legislative and executive branches of US government. During his second term, President Bush will have a much firmer base in the Congress, with a comfortable majority in the House of Representatives as well as the Senate.

Bush's comprehensive victory is all the more surprising because he won it despite setbacks in Iraq, despite the death of more than 1,000 US soldiers and countless Iraqis, and despite the absence of weapons of mass destruction and human rights violations in Abu Ghraib prison. His victory signals a clear shift of America to the right.

Now, the all important question is: what will Mr Bush do with his historic victory and how will the rest of the world, which had been praying for a Kerry victory, react? Will he take his re-election as an endorsement of his first term and see it as a national mandate to pursue his policies, goals and strong-arm methods in the second term? Will he continue to pursue a policy of unilateralism, displaying a sort of contemptuous attitude towards the UN and "old Europe"?

In short, will he continue to pursue the "Bush doctrine" which asserts the right of the United States to intervene wherever and whenever it perceives that a threat of terrorism or mass destruction exists? With imperialist overtones, it gives the United States the right to not only decide who is a terrorist and which state is supporting terrorist activities, but also the right to launch unilateral preventive strikes without even waiting for the go-ahead from the UN Security Council.

But many perceptive analysts believe Mr Bush will be more careful and pragmatic in his second term as he would like to make it more successful than the first one. As he contemplates his second term he will realize that he faces far more difficult challenges than he did in 2000. Not only are there a host of problems (Iraq, Iran, Middle East and North Korea), his own country, though the world's sole superpower, is stretched both militarily and financially.

His aim will be not only to secure his own place, but also America's, in history. For that it will be necessary for him to adopt a new tone and new tactics and to secure broad

support at home and around the world. His cabinet appointments will give some clue about his thinking, and the goals and policies he intends to pursue during his second term in office.

Mr Bush must be aware that America's global power has never been greater than it is today and rarely has what the US president decides mattered so much to so many people in the world. No one knows better than Mr Bush that ever since 9/11 America's global leadership has never been under such sustained pressure and challenges as it is now.

The issue that will, or should, receive his prompt attention in the second term is the surge in the anti-American sentiment around the world, particularly in the Arab, Muslim and European countries. Never in American history has the US been so unpop-

against terrorism.

The biggest challenge of his second term may lie in North Korea and Iran. North Korea reportedly possesses between six to 10 nuclear bombs or the fuel to make them. Iran is believed to have made substantial progress on uranium enrichment. Washington fears these regimes may pass on some fissile material to terrorists. With 135,000 troops in Iraq, another 15,000 in Afghanistan and reserve-call-ups being extended, the US is already stretched militarily. Preventive strikes on a would-be nuclear state are one thing, but Washington would prefer to avoid a full-scale war even with a medium power at this point.

Owing to the spending spree of the first term, the US is also stretched financially. Four years ago, when Mr Bush began his term, the budget had a surplus of \$236 bil-

lion; now the annual deficit is more than \$400 billion. The current account deficit is expected to be more than \$600 billion or about 5.5 per cent of the GDP. The deficit has grown partly because of the defence and homeland security and partly because of troops deployment in Iraq and Afghanistan. Some sort of fiscal discipline may be necessary in the second term.

There is no likelihood of any shift in US policy towards South Asia. The "strategic partnership" between Washington and New Delhi will continue to grow because their relationship, in the words of National Security

Adviser Condoleezza Rice, "goes beyond security, proliferation or regional issues." Pakistan will continue to be important to the US because it is a key ally in the war against terrorism and Al Qaeda.

An indication of how relieved and comfortable Islamabad is feeling after Bush's victory has been provided by the Pakistan Foreign Office spokesman. During his press briefing on November 8, the spokesman observed that Pakistan's "concerns and apprehensions" about the continuity of Washington's relations with Islamabad were allayed after President Bush's re-election. But is Islamabad justified in calling it "a durable and stable" relationship if its future becomes uncertain and doubtful after every four years?

US deputy secretary of state Richard Armitage, during his recent visit, assured Pakistan of "continuity and expansion" of bilateral ties in all spheres, particularly economic and security matters. He is also reported to have assured a "sympathetic review" of the F-16s issue which will be the litmus test of American "commitment to build strong ties with Pakistan." The US has not so far supplied the long paid for F-16s to Pakistan because of opposition from India, its "strategic partner". Let us wait and see if the Bush's second term will prove to be more propitious for Pakistan as far as the supply of F-16s are concerned.

The writer is a former ambassador.

The war against terrorism will continue to be the top priority of the Bush administration. The original membership of Al Qaeda may have diminished but there has been no lack of new recruits. The International Institute of Strategic Studies in London, in a recent report, has estimated that Al Qaeda can potentially draw on 18,000 operatives in 60 countries and the organization has been galvanized by the Iraq war.

ular, mistrusted, feared and even hated. This phenomenon has undermined US influence across the globe, making it difficult for Washington to persuade others to support American policies.

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The former chief of the CIA's Osama bin Laden unit, Michael Scheuer, in a recent interview with the *New York Times*, said that Al Qaeda was now "a global Islamic insurgency" rather than a terrorist organization and charged that the Bush administration had failed to recognize that it posed a much different threat than previously believed.

One of the principal reasons for the anti-American sentiment in the Islamic world is the pro-Israeli policies followed by the United States. As a second-term president, Mr Bush can afford not to take a one-sided approach to the Israel-Palestine conflict and hold Ariel Sharon to his commitment to help create a Palestinian state. Failure to follow a policy based on justice and equity will make it almost impossible for the United States to promote democratic reforms in the Arab world, nor be able to succeed in the war