

Open letter to ^{the R. Part} Condoleezza Rice

BY ROEDAD KHAN

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Dear Dr. Rice, I am a retired civil servant. My association with America goes back to 1940 when I joined Forman Christian College Lahore run by the American Presbyterian Church. Its liberal, tolerant and progressive environment has left a deep imprint on my life.

I developed great respect for my American professors who introduced me to Washington, Jefferson and Adams who set the world ablaze, not with guns but with the timeless values and ideals America stood for in those days. That is the face of America I would always like to remember.

No aspect of American society struck me more vividly during my stay in your beautiful country than the friendliness and warmth of the American people. I was in Washington on September 11. On return from an early morning walk, I was shocked to see, on television, the terrible human tragedy in which thousands of innocent men and women lost their lives.

Nobody can justify or condone a crime of such unparalleled magnitude. We understand America's anger and we share its grief and pain but on September 20, as we listened to President George W. Bush's wartime rhetoric and wild west allegories, we held our breath. When he finished, the spontaneous reaction of all those present was that President Bush had virtually declared war on the entire Islamic world. Sadly, subsequent events have confirmed our worst fears.

Afghanistan and Iraq are under American military occupation and

American ceased to be sovereign, independent countries. America must not let its need for revenge blur its judgment, for the rage of a wounded giant can be irrational, its direction unpredictable.

Two hundred years ago, the United States was militarily weak and economically poor, but to millions of people in other countries, America was the hope of the world because of the timeless values America stood for. From the beginning, America has been more than a place. It represented the values and ideals of a humane civilisation.

Two hundred years ago, America

face of America we see now is the one of military power.

"My greatest complaint", Tocqueville wrote almost two hundred years ago, "against democratic government, as organised in the United States, is not, as many Europeans make out, its weakness, but rather its irresistible strength. What I find most repulsive in America is not the extreme freedom reigning there but the shortage of guarantees against tyranny".

What many friends of America find hard to understand is how America, upholder of the 'rights of man' and the beacon of liberty, could be transformed so quickly into a semi-police state. The Bush administration's post-September 11 assault on civil liberties, its refusal to release the names and locations of detainees, and its insistence on secret hearings, conjures up Kafka novels.

The US Constitution guarantees that those suspected of crimes must be informed of the charges against them, be able to confront their accusers, consult with a lawyer, and have a speedy and open trial. But all that means very little in America today because the government can revoke all these rights merely by labelling someone a combatant. Jefferson once said: "the tyranny of legislature (in the United States) is the most formidable dread at present and will be for many years. That of the executive will come in its turn, but it will be at a remote period". Is Jefferson's grim forecast coming true?

The biggest headache for the United States stems not from the invasion and conquest of Iraq, but from the aftermath—the old conundrum of military history—what to do with the loser?

Now that the country has been conquered and Saddam's regime driven from power, the US is left "owning" an ethnically divided country of 22 million people ravaged by more than two decades of war. Saddam is gone. Iraq is "liberated" but Iraqis have lost everything—security of person, property, honour and jobs.

More than 100,000 civilians have died as a direct or indirect consequence of the US-led invasion in

caught the imagination of the world because of the ideals it stood for. Today its example is tarnished with military adventurism and conflicts abroad.

Woodrow Wilson sought to make the world safe for democracy. Today America is punishing its enemies with its particular brand of democracy and rewarding its authoritarian friends with silence on democratisation.

"For a nation that honors democracy and freedom", the New York Times wrote in its editorial, "the United States has a nasty habit of embracing foreign dictators when they seem to serve US interest. It is one of the least appealing traits of US foreign policy. Like his predecessors, President Bush is falling for the illusion that tyrants make good allies ... when Washington preaches democracy while tolerating the tyranny of allies, America looks double-faced".

In the past, some envied America, some liked America, some hated America but almost all respected her. And all knew that without the United States peace and freedom would not have survived. Today President Bush appears to believe in a kind of unilateral civilisation. The United Nations is an afterthought; treaties are not considered binding.

The war on terror is used to topple weak Muslim regimes. Today Washington's main message to the world seems to be, 'take dictation'. No wonder, very few respect America these days.

The poor and the weak are scared to death and fear the world's only superpower. In the eyes of millions of Muslims throughout the world, America is perceived today as the greatest threat to the world of Islam since the 13th century.

Americans seem to have forgotten America as an idea, as a source of optimism and as a beacon of liberty. For more than two centuries, America was the cradle of liberty, the destination point for those who seek to live in freedom, and the source of inspiration for those who want to make their own countries as free as America itself.

Today America is like a fortress on the hill. It can only stand alone, casting a menacing shadow over all beneath. Americans have stopped talking about who they are and are only talking now about who they are going to invade, oust or sanction.

These days nobody would think of appealing to the United States for support for upholding a human rights case—may be to Canada, to Norway or to Sweden, but not to the United States. Before there were three faces of America in the world—the face of the Peace corps, America that helps others, the face of multi nationals and the face of US military power. The balance has gone wrong lately and the only

Iraq. More than half of the deaths caused by the occupation forces were women and children, the so-called 'collateral damage' of this totally unjust, unprovoked war.

When Iraqis resist, American soldiers pounce on them shooting unarmed civilians, setting their houses on fire. And all these Christian acts are accompanied by outcries against the savage Iraqis who dare to lift a hand against civilised Americans.

Democracy is a great idea, Dr Rice, but it is not going to grow in a garden trod upon by American boots. Dreams of democracy taking roots in the garden of Baghdad and then spreading like the flowers of spring throughout the Middle East have given way to the awful reality of bombing, kidnappings and beheadings.

Until Bush arrived on the world stage, it was axiomatic that the "habits of democracy are the habits of peace"; that democratic states abide by norms of behavior in the conduct of their foreign policy. Both Paine and Jefferson felt that the new nation could and should make a sharp break with the past and conduct a foreign policy guided by law and reason, not power politics.

Jefferson claimed that "war and coercion were legitimate principles in the dark ages, but that in the new era of democracy and law, relations between nations should be guided by "but one code of morality". Bush has reversed all that and, echoing what you wrote in the Journal Foreign Affairs 2000, is intent on reinstating the old imperial logic of power that 'might makes right'.

You, Dr. Rice, are known as smart, diligent, honest and intellectually head and shoulders above the men who surround President Bush. You would be closer to the President than any Secretary of State since Henry Kissinger under Richard Nixon, and probably closer than any Cabinet member since Robert Kennedy as Attorney General under his brother. You have the President's ear in ways few others do.

I have therefore taken the liberty of addressing you in the hope that this letter will reach you, and you will find the time to ponder over some of my observations and suggestions. Today the hope of the world lies not only in the strength and will of the United States but in its sense of justice and fairness.

America will never win the battle against terrorism if it persists in its blind support of Israel. And it can never win over hearts and minds if it does not identify itself with democratic forces in the Islamic world and continues to support military dictators, hereditary monarchs, corrupt and effete rulers.

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