**From Relentless War to Relentless Diplomacy**

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After the dismantling of the Soviet Union in 1991, the US was left in a state of ideological bewilderment: clueless about how to enforce its New World Order. Francis Fukuyama’s “The End of History” recipe didn’t work because while China was growingly emerging on the world scene as an economic power, the Islamic militancy, emboldened by its victory in Afghanistan, had begun to haunt Americans. On its heels came Samuel Huntington’s “The Clash of Civilisations.”

There were widespread speculations that Asia-Pacific was soon becoming the new theatre of global conflict. But the plan changed when China’s fighter jets intercepted and chased out the intrusive US reconnaissance planes.

Back at home, the Neocons had already taken the reins in Washington and television channels started projecting ecstatic priests and pastors, heralding the promised Armageddon to jam-packed halls of vivacious Christian devotees.

Not lagging behind them was the firebrand Islamic clerics trumpeting the universal Caliphate of Islam.

While the vigour of the comparatively secular Christian theologians gradually faded out over time, the aggressive Islamic clerics of the kind of Zakir Nayek and Ahmad Deedat held the ground, catalysing jihadist movements across the world.

While the Soviet Union could not bear the shock of its bleeding defeat in Afghanistan, the US decisively defied the hostile predictions of its doom.

With the assassination of Dr Abdullah Azzam, the Palestinian Akhwani defensive jihadist, in Peshawar in November 1989, the torch of Jihad was shifted, besides Ayman Al-Zawahiri, to Osama Bin Laden, hitherto only a financier of Mujahideen, not having any background in religious learning.

Al Qaeda came into existence as an umbrella for jihadist outfits around the world. In Afghanistan, the mantle of jihad passed from the modern educated Akhwani Mujahideen to the seminary graduated Taliban having a rural orientation and a strictly sectarian demeanour.

Political currents and cross-currents in the Muslim world provided patronage to extremist militants who by now had become reliable strategic assets. Non-state Jihadists mushroomed across the region.

Two hundred and twenty-four people, mostly Americans, were killed and over 4000 others injured in two simultaneous joint suicide attacks of Al Qaeda and the Egypt-based Islamic Jihad group on US embassies in Tanzania and Kenya in 1998.

Then came the much-reverberated suicide attack on US guided-missile destroyer, USS Cole, at Aden Port in 2000.

The very next year, the September 11, 2001 attacks on World Trade Center and the Pentagon killing 2977 people and injuring 6000 just changed the scenario.

It shattered the nerves of Americans. At the height of this desperation, the US and its NATO allies unleashed the horrific war of Shock and Awe in Afghanistan, and later in Iraq. The dreadful B-52 showered clusters of daisy-cutter bombs over militant hideouts, opening gates of hell, not only on terrorists but also devastating civilian lives. The massacre was just indiscriminate.

Once unleashed, the war did not stop at the boundaries of Afghanistan and Iraq. Losses were also not one-sided. Both the Islamist militants and the US forces dealt paralysing blows on each other. Osama Bin Laden even gave a verdict that common US citizens must also not be spared as it was with their tax money that US forces waged the war, a notion though alien to Islamic principles of Jihad.

Al Qaeda and its affiliates mounted the Madrid train attack in 2004 in which 191 people were killed. It was followed by the London bus attack in 2005, killing seven people but sending shockwaves across the West.

While none of the worthwhile objectives of the War on Terror was achieved, the incursion came to an end on August 15, 2021, in the shape of a humiliating retreat from Afghanistan.

One fact remains to acknowledge. While the Soviet Union could not bear the shock of its bleeding defeat in Afghanistan, getting shattered into bits and pieces and suffering a huge economic collapse, the US decisively defied the hostile predictions of its doom. It stood again very soon to shoulder its leadership role in the world.

This testifies to the resilient nature of the American nation and the strength of its system. The US still rules the world, albeit in a changed way;

“We have ended 20 years of conflict in Afghanistan. And as we close this period of relentless war, we are opening a new era of relentless diplomacy,” President Joe Biden said while addressing the UN General Assembly in New York last week.

This is what the US should have done 20 years ago. History flows on – neither in a straight line, not in circles, but in a spiral motion. It has its dynamics. Neither can one stop its flow by force, nor change its course with might.

Better late than never. Diplomacy, or soft power to be more specific, is the only tool to govern world politics. President Biden seems to be cognizant of that;

“We are not seeking a new Cold War, or a world divided into rigid blocs,” he went a step further, expressing his wish to “engage deeply with the rest of the world.”

In this, President Biden has announced his doctrine, which those having their fingers on the flow of history can appreciate. It has the potential to alter the course of history – for the collective good of the entire world.

Russia and China are yet to respond.

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