

# Pre-emptive doctrine at play

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writes from New Jersey, USA

WHEN President Bush decided to go to war against Saddam Hussain, the world by and large saw the action as lacking international legitimacy. No imminent threat to US was seen, and there was a feeling that disarmament of Saddam regime could have been done peacefully. Huge anti-war protests across the globe demonstrated how distressed and horrified almost all nations felt about the looming prospect of deaths and miseries that America's colossal military might would wreak on an incomparably weaker and mismatched Iraq. There was a fear that this war would have terrible consequences not only in the region but also on the broader world landscape. While the whole world stood by the US after 9/11, this time even close European allies like France and Germany not only disagreed with but fiercely opposed military action. Never before in a war was America's moral and diplomatic position looked so bad.

Against this unpleasant backdrop, from Mr. Bush's perspective this war had to be won swiftly and surgically with a minimum level of civilian casualties. As we approach a very critical closing stage of the conflict, it is clear that the war has not gone the way that the administration desired. Enormous damage has been done on the propaganda front. While the dramatic success of the 3<sup>rd</sup> infantry division and the first marine division has buoyed up the

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nation, the more important battle for 'hearts and minds' has not been won.

There are different prisms on the Iraq war, depending on from where you happen to view it. In America's TV channels the defining theme is how the nation's unique high tech precision weapons are rolling back the Saddam's forces. The huge explosions of tomahawks, the cruise missiles and those huge bunkerbusters unleashed by the B52s on Saddam's palaces, the Bath party headquarters and other command and control centres are shown while the reporters exude a sense of gloating. The focus is on how the coalition forces have been trying not to alienate the goodwill of the common Iraqis while seeking the removal of a brutal regime.

From the viewpoint of Arab countries the war is an arrogant and cruel assault on one of their fellow nations. Saddam Hussain, a litany of brutalities and horrific image has been submerged beneath the bombing. By the Arabs he is seen as one of them giving a fight to the world's most powerful nation that has not shown any sensitivity to the issues of their concern. American policy on the Palestinian issue has



Victims of unjust war: pre-emptive strike

specially defined the Arab attitude to this war and the way it is being covered

in Arab media.

*The New York Times* (4th April) in a

long report vividly captured the sense of outrage in Arab countries. It men-

tions the dead bodies of a woman and her baby lying in a wooden coffin. A news stand owner in Cairo speaks of President Bush's talk about freeing the Iraqis, then pointing to the photo, asks: "Is she free? What has she done? What has her baby done?" Susan Sachs, the reporter, samples other such reactions. She says that the war has triggered a dangerous process of radicalisation in the Arab societies. The moderate Arab regimes are under a huge threat. Even a pro-Western king of Jordan said that this was an invasion, obviously yielding to the anti-war protests in the country.

If one looks at the general tone of the media coverage in Britain, the impression is inescapable that there is much unease over the political backlash. The British people who spent long periods working in the Arab world say that the Americans do not understand the minds of these people. They say that the Americans do not comprehend the depth of resentment towards the US. It is important to remember that the British had colonial experience in the region. As the mandatory power under the League of Nations, Britain tried to shape the contours of politics in Iraq after the country was created after the First World War. They know a thing or two about the political mindset of the Iraqis.

Two particular evidences show how Britain and America look at things differently even though Britain is America's closest ally in this conflict.

Mr. Tony Blair has recognised how desperately necessary it is to move forward in a more evenhanded spirit on the Palestinian problem. He pushed Mr. Bush to include a reference to the road map on the Middle East when they met in Azores. Mr. Blair has talked about importance of this matter several times lately. What degree of commitment Mr. Bush feels to this issue, and how serious his administration is about pushing the peace process forward will be of paramount importance for the stability in the region.

A second issue on which there is a degree of disconnect between Britain and America is what role will the United Nations should play in post Saddam Iraq. Mr. Blair feels that the UN is in the centre of the effort to create a new order in Iraq. His position is closer to that of France, Germany and Russia. The British papers forcefully talk about the need for UN's central role in Iraq.

The US administration is against conceding the main role to UN. On 5<sup>th</sup> April the national security adviser Condoleezza Rice said that it was the American led alliance that shed "life and blood" -- and not the UN -- and the lead role for creating a new government will be for the coalition.

The Iraq war is the first experiment in the new doctrine of pre-emption that President Bush proclaimed last September. Essentially, this doctrine

says that America will take military action against any rogue regime which is engaged in making weapons of mass destruction that America thinks can be used against it at some future point. In other words the threat will be removed before it is imminent.

Given the realities of global power dynamics and America's huge military superiority over any other nation, only America can invoke this new doctrine. This is a radically new principle of self-defence. Inside America it is a group of neo-conservatives, in the Republican party, who are pushing this principle. The post 9/11 environment has helped them.

There are those at the liberal end of the American political spectrum who think that it is against America's interest to behave like this. A senior Democratic Senator from West Virginia, Senator Robert Byrd, made a moving statement when President Bush decided to use force on Iraq; "Today, I weep for my country. I have watched the events of recent months with a heavy, heavy heart. No more is America's image one of a strong and benevolent peacemaker."

Now that the doctrine of pre-emptive strike has moved from paper to actual practice, the strategic picture changes. Nations will have to ponder how they readjust.

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# Coalescing allies

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WHEN Russia and Germany significantly changed their stand on Iraq war many expressed surprise. They were unable to relate this stand of the three major dissenting powers to their earlier opposition to war. But this coming together of allies and Russia was not unusual or totally unexpected.

The approval of the UN Security Council was denied to the US and Britain to start a war against Iraq as Russia, France and China threatened to veto the resolution forcing its withdrawal. To salvage its prestige, the only remaining superpower of the world went ahead with what it had planned earlier.

But this was not a new thing. Even during the first Gulf War the US had taken the unilateral decision to start the war. However, at that time it was able to mould the UN according to its wishes and got resolutions passed to the effect what was already happening. But this time it did not happen as the international situation is starkly different compared to what it was at that time.

During the first Gulf war international world order was in a flux. The old world order had collapsed but the new one had not emerged. The Warsaw Pact had crumbled and Russia was disintegrating. Russia was also economically and politically in turmoil. Hence, no significant opposition to war was expected from it. Its silence also con-

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firmed that now the US has no competition as a superpower in the post-Cold

War world.

Though France was also a party to

war during the first Gulf crisis, its contribution was largely symbolic. Germany did not contribute militarily. Its economic assistance also came after much delay and under pressure from the allies as it was undergoing reunification. Post-war Germany had become an economic giant but it had also learnt to appreciate the low costs associated with acting as the 'political dwarf'.

In any case, German involvement in the Middle East has always been peripheral unlike other major European powers. Germans never pursued a high profile foreign or security policy in Middle East and preferred to restrict themselves to the economic area. Their interest remained limited to the strategically important oil and the vast export market in the area. But the memories of Nazi crimes tended to tilt German diplomacy towards Israel. German diplomacy had therefore to do a tightrope walking while dealing with these contradictory demands.

During the first Gulf crisis Germany supported the war effort openly only after Israel was attacked with Scud missiles by the Iraq. Germany was also feeling guilty as there was mounting evidence that its companies had collaborated in Iraq's poison gas making plants. Threat of its use by Iraq revived memories of Nazi days. Public opinion in Germany dramatically shifted after Iraq attacked Israel with Scud missiles. This attack gave a kind of legitimacy to war in Germany.

Germany, France and Russia have important commercial interests in the Gulf which acts as a restraining factor. They import oil and pay back by exporting high technology goods. All the three countries are major arms exporters to the Gulf region. In October 1982, the coalition, headed by Helmut Kohl pursued a more liberal arms export policy and there was rapid expansion of German arms exports to the Middle East. During the Iran-Iraq war FRG was after France, the second largest West European arms supplier. It earned huge profits supplying to both the parties. The FRG tried to camouflage this trade by laying emphasis on supply of less visible weaponry.

The export of surplus arms production helped it to reduce unemployment and controlled recession. Restrictions

were imposed basically on high visibility major weapons system such as tanks. Naval systems constituted the main bulk of German direct arms exports during the 1970s. In fact, government encouraged the expansion of this category of exports to fight the pressure of recession. Despite the apparent restrictions on arms exports in Germany it emerged as the world's fifth largest arms exporter and its arms exports grew fourfold. Middle Eastern countries have also invested surplus petrodollars into the European economy.

Besides economic interests there are other important factors which forced Germany and France to take a different stand. The typical development of the post-war German state resulted in a pacifist strategic culture of Germany, which rejected aggressive power politics. It is still difficult for the Germans to accept use of military as a tool of foreign policy. In fact many politicians are critical of the military. Moreover, after Vietnam war it has always been difficult to obtain domestic consensus in fighting war in an alliance with US.

In Germany Red-Green coalition is in power. Though German foreign policy has undergone significant transformation in recent times, a large number of activists of these parties are still against any war. Both President Gerhard Schroeder and Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer have faced serious opposition inside their parties whenever they have tried to take a decision regarding military contribution whether it was in Kosovo or Afghanistan.

Besides, there is a general aversion to war in Europe. Europeans now do not want war to return again on the continent as they enjoy a lifestyle unprecedented in their history.

During the first Gulf crisis Iraq was seen as aggressor threatening peace and stability in the Middle East. Hence most Arab states willy-nilly agreed to the attack. But situation was different when the attack was launched second time on Iraq. Most of the Arab states oppose this attack and see it as a threat to the Arab world.

The participation of Germany, France and Russia could have seriously harmed their business interests by alienating the Muslim countries. Their companies could also have become target of protesting population against war. This is the last thing which export economies like Germany and France would want.

But as the war nears an end in the Gulf, allies are regrouping again. The three major powers have served their interests by maintaining a safe distance from the warring coalition of the US and Britain and thus safeguarding their important business interests. They now want to mend fences with the US with whom their relation has suffered because of their non-participation in war and threat of use of Veto power in the Security Council. Hence in this second phase they are now adopting a more pragmatic approach which is clearly seen in the statement of the Russian President Vladimir Putin who has said that the foreign policy decision cannot be taken on the basis of emotions. Similarly, German president Gerhard Schroeder and its Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer have also considerably changed their stand. France has also significantly mellowed down. Now these countries are looking to serve their long term interests which they think lies with the US. Hence a reversal in stand has taken place.

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