

The War of Liberation, Nixon and Kissinger Hard sum of grand alliance

SYED MUAZZEM ALI

THE confidential US documents pertaining to the events of 1971 have been made public by the State Department recently, thirty-four years after the independence of Bangladesh. The Department released these sensitive documents in accordance with a rule that allows release of classified documents 30 years after the event. This publication contains the official record of U.S. foreign policy of that period and, more importantly, key documentation on the Nixon Administration's policy both before and during the Indo-Pakistan War of 1971, which had led to the independence of Bangladesh.

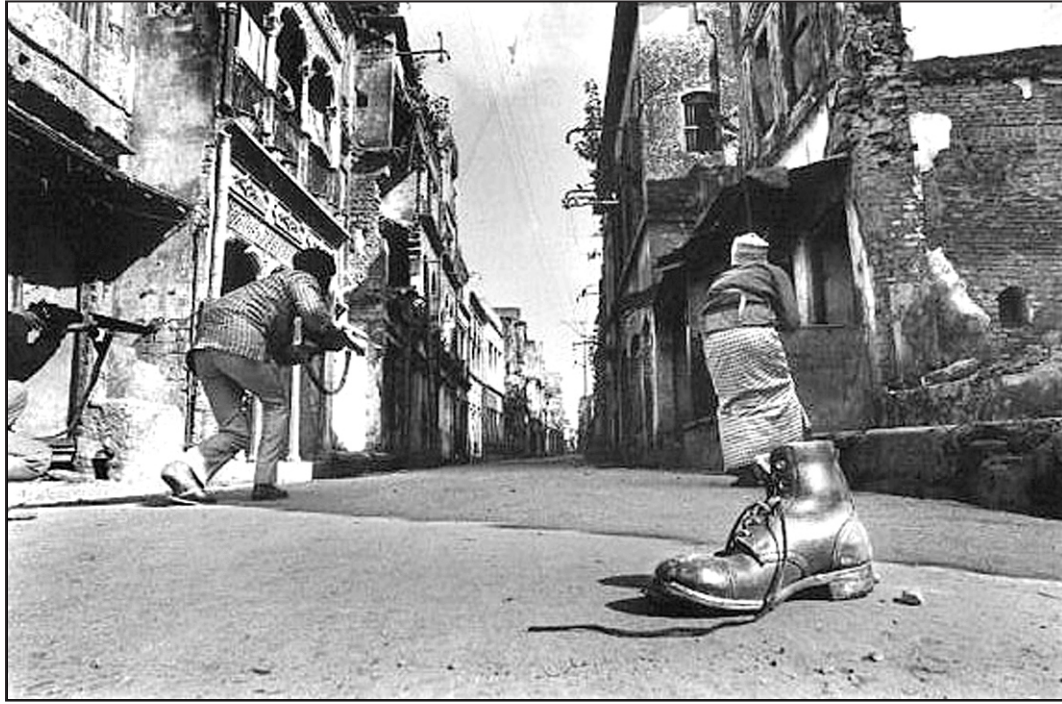
The documents detail Nixon and Kissinger's policy of "tilt" toward Pakistan and reveal their "scant sympathy" towards the suffering humanity and their lack of sensitivity to the "carnage" in Bangladesh. Although their Consul-General in Dhaka, Archer K. Blood, and other Mission officials had sent detailed accounts of atrocities committed by Pakistani troops and even gone to the extent of publicly submitting a note of dissent to the American policy, the Nixon administration refused to take any step to restrain the military regime. Even the eyewitness accounts by US journalists and citizens who were evacuated from Bangladesh failed to move them.

Fortunately, the vast majority of US public did not share the apathy of the Nixon administration and had openly expressed their support for, and solidarity with, the distressed people of Bangladesh. The US Congress, both Senate and House of Representatives, kept the issue under constant review and passed important bills to suspend US military and economic assistance to Pakistan. The US media prominently covered the genocidal war perpetrated by Pakistanis in Bangladesh. Even schoolchildren saved lunch money to help Bangladeshi refugees. Yet, Nixon and his National Security Adviser Kissinger were unmoved. Despite various prodding, they did not act to prevent the genocide in Bangladesh; on the contrary, they supported the Pakistani military regime, which was acting as a secret conduit for a diplomatic opening to Beijing.

I was posted in Washington DC during that crucial period, first as a Pakistani diplomat and then, after declaring our allegiance to Bangladesh, as a founding member of Bangladesh Mission/ Embassy. Therefore, I was a witness to the policy of Nixon administration during our War of Independence. Naturally, these newly released documents are of immense interest to me.

Most of the materials contained in the 900-page volume are known to us since several important books have already been published on the subject. Soon after the War, noted columnist Jack Anderson had published the book "Anderson Papers" which had given us some insights to the confidential National Security Council Meetings in White House during the war. Kissinger, in his memoirs "White House Years", had tried to justify the Administration's actions (or inactions) at the crucial moments of our nationhood. What really surprised me when I went through the documents was the level to which Nixon and Kissinger had stooped when the developments in South Asia had not

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Freedom fighters in Dhaka street, (below) Nixon and Kissinger.

proceeded in the desired manner.

Mrs. Gandhi visited Washington in early November as part of her global effort to explain New Delhi's position on the Bangladesh situation. Nixon had two rounds of meetings with her. The first meeting took place on 4 November 1971. Mrs. Gandhi primarily emphasised the need for immediate release of Bangabandhu, and political resolution of the crisis. Nixon, as confirmed by these documents, claimed that they were pressing on Islamabad not to execute Bangabandhu but doubted whether Yahya Khan would "survive" if Bangabandhu was released at that stage. Why on earth should he be so concerned about the fate of a military ruler whose barbarity had brought misery to millions in the region?

Instead of taking initiative for the political resolution of the problem, Nixon was more interested in bringing in a semblance of normalcy in the region by sending humanitarian aid, deployment of international observers, and mutual troop withdrawal by India and Pakistan. He told her that "nothing could be achieved by the disintegration of Pakistan" and warned that any outbreak of hostilities between India and Pakistan would be totally "unacceptable" to US. Earlier, Washington had even gone to the extent of threatening New Delhi with cutting off economic aid if she went to war. All these tough talks were clearly aimed at intimidating Mrs. Gandhi, and preventing her from taking any military action against Pakistan.

Mrs. Gandhi had received members of Bangladesh Mission in Washington DC at the Blair House (the official Guest house of the US President) right after her meeting at the White House. Our Mission Chief, M.R. Siddiqi, had led us to



that meeting. Since she was made to wait at the White House, she arrived late for our meeting. We were introduced to her and she received us very warmly. From her discussions it was apparent that the meeting had not gone well, and that Nixon had very little interest in the resolution of the Bangladesh issue.

The documents reveal that Nixon had met Kissinger at the Oval Office the following morning. Kissinger reassured his boss that the latter had met his objective. Nixon boasted that they "really slobbered over the old witch". Kissinger's overall assessment about the conflict was: "The Indians are bastards anyway. They are starting the war there. To them East Pakistan is no longer the issue." Nixon also believed that "India was trying to start another war to take advantage of the opportunity to destroy

Pakistan."

Nixon had a second round of meeting with Mrs. Gandhi on 5 November, and he hardly made any reference to the crisis in South Asia. Instead, he talked about other international developments, especially his planned visit to China. It is a pity that Nixon, the champion of democracy and human rights of the cold war era, cared little for the most appalling violation of human rights and the trampling of our democratic rights by their ally Pakistan. Nixon refused to view our independence struggle in its proper perspective.

Some believe that the Nixon administration had viewed the developments in South Asia in the East-West bipolarity context of the cold war era. Washington had considered India's signing of the mutual security treaty with the

Soviet Union in August 1971 as a blank check to New Delhi in its confrontation with Islamabad. Nixon had asked Soviet leaders not to encourage India, and had warned India of dire consequences if it started a war with Pakistan.

These documents demonstrate that when the India-Pakistan war finally started, Nixon administration tried for the adoption of a ceasefire resolution at the UN Security Council. The Western draft called for withdrawal of Indian and Pakistani troops to internationally recognised boundaries without making any reference to political resolution of the conflict. Soviet Union vetoed this move twice.

As the Pakistani army was collapsing, Nixon decided to send the seventh fleet to the Bay of Bengal ostensibly to evacuate the US citizens, but in reality it was meant to bolster their morale and to intimidate the Indians. Even Nixon, as per these documents, urged their hitherto adversary Beijing, through Kissinger, to deploy troops on its border with India to put pressure on New Delhi. It is true that Beijing too had supported Pakistan and had opposed our liberation struggle but, fortunately, they did not fall for the Nixon plan and refused to get militarily involved in the war.

These documents also confirm that Nixon's strategy of putting pressure on India from north and south was aimed at helping Pakistani troops to hold out the war for at least a few more weeks, which would have given them another opportunity to build a new consensus at the UN Security Council for a cease fire, mutual troop withdrawal to internationally recognised boundaries and deployment of UN peace keeping forces. They had hoped that this would defuse Bangladesh independence movement and protect break-up of their ally Pakistan.

The Nixon plan did not work. Ninety-three thousand Pakistani troops could not sustain the war for even two weeks. The strategy and the blitzkrieg military attack on the occupation forces by our valiant freedom fighters and the India-Bangladesh joint forces, led by Lt General Jagjit Singh Aurora, forced the early capitulation of the Pakistani forces, leading to their surrender on 16 December 1971. Bangladesh emerged as an independent state.

In the face of growing domestic and international pressure, Nixon had to extend diplomatic recognition to Bangladesh in April 1972. He also wrote a letter to Bangabandhu expressing his Administration's interest in the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries. The letter was personally handed over to Bangabandhu by the US Mission Chief Spivak. In a short time, our Mission in Washington DC received a reply from Bangabandhu. We were advised by State Department to forward it through diplomatic channel but we were told by Dhaka to insist on reciprocity. Finally, after waiting for few weeks, Nixon had to receive our Mission Chief Enayet Karim at the White House. However, when Bangabandhu visited Washington in October 1974, Nixon was nowhere in the scene. He had resigned a few months earlier to avoid impeachment for the Watergate misdeeds.

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AR SHAMSUL ISLAM

POWER politics has by now fashioned to be, more or less, order of the world. It is cruder in developing countries and when Bangladesh is concerned, it festers into the crudest. Why so? The simple answer is that in our country gaining political power means winning nothing short of an Aladin's lamp and making most use of that magic wand to get fabulously rich overnight, to array, in queue, police, administration, bank and even judiciary, latest in the series of annexations, at the doorstep.

Our next national poll probably comes off in January 2007 as per schedule. Some say it will be brought forward by the alliance government but it does not fit into political culture of ruling parties who like to enjoy power till the last moment.

True to the existing putrid and pervert tradition, the main opposition, the Awami League, started opposing the ruling combine from day one of their taking the rein of government. It has continued to do so till the day. But practically no result has come out. This is not so much for dearth of any issue offered by the ruling alliance as for failure of the Awami League to muster people's confidence in the party leadership that when in power ruffled people's feeling by protecting identified party godfather(s) of terrorism and corruption.

For sometime past the Awami League has been in quest of something as a grand alliance with the secular, pro-liberation forces like 11-party, JSD (Inu) to launch a joint movement causing fall of the government and fight out the BNP alliance in the next polls. Some progress has been achieved in this direction. Rashed Khan Menon, Hasanul Huq Inu have responded with positive gestures exhibiting good amount of practical sense and useful flexibility. But the CPB is wavering, harping on the old, hackneyed advocacy that both Awami League and BNP are the same 'imperialistic' stuff and the CPB prefers to stick to pursuing its own political goal keeping it off from the clutches of Awami League and BNP alike.

It is to be noted that the Awami League and the BNP cannot possibly be bracketed together under broader classification of political parties. It is probably true that both are selfish, opportunists, greedy, undemocratic in acts and deeds, violators of promises and pledges, on and off elections. Still there are some vital differences between the two. True, the Awami League was also found to have, sometimes in the past, joined hands with the Jamaat and given costly indulgence to furthering its (Jamaat) agenda. Yet the Awami League is a party distinctive in bearing the mark of being secular, Bengalee nationalist, non-communal, leader of the liberation war and major bearer of its spirit. Whereas the BNP is by its large almost the reverse.

The left-leaning parties have not, in fact, any substantial number of voters. Their activities are more or less confined in the metropolitan capital and some divisional headquarters, though both the print and electronic media have given them respectable coverage. It is not anyway calculated that the Awami League, by forging an unity with the leftists, will be much benefited in garnering votes. Still that unity will certainly carry a kind of symbolic

value. It will be welcome to the civil society. The illiterate voters may be dazzled by the resounding name of 'mahajote'.

Time has come for the CPB leadership to mathematically count the relative cost effectiveness of both the alternatives - joining the alliance led by the Awami League and shying away from the outfit. The CPB may consider carefully the following factors. First, will its non-joining be able to negate formation of that alliance? Secondly, if it cannot undo creation of an alliance, will it not suffer from a handicap created by its own mistake? Thirdly, if the BNP alliance, trading over the division of pro-liberation forces, wins the coming polls, will it not deal a death blow to all those who stand for secularism and Bengalee nationalism enjoyed by the liberation war? Fourthly, do a regime led by the Awami League and another ruled by the BNP carry the same implications in term of the prospect of the CPB to pursue its own ideology? Fifthly, CPB should think over doubly if the dogma of 'go alone' holds good nowadays. In India CPM is joked to Congress. Khaleida Zia has also taken into her fold SQ Choudhury who once reportedly slandered her personally. Sixthly,

The lapse that should not elude attention is that there are enough roars from the opposition on the outline of reforms in the structure of caretaker government and election commission, but it is unfortunate that the opposition has not yet spelled out what service and care they will yield to the people if they come to power. People like to make the grand alliance declare their political agenda.

can the leadership of the CPB afford to remain indifferent to the historic call of the day to join an alliance of the pro-liberation forces to contain the religious fundamentalists that have already created a wide network across the country through alleged support and help of the BNP?

Dr Kamal Hossain, Chief of the Gonoforum, former President Dr Badruddoza Choudhury of Bikalpadhara, may join the grand alliance now in the making. There are allegations that the leader of the opposition is in the habit of acting arbitrarily even on vital issues that sometimes go erratic and harm the party. Following win in the coming national polls if a national government led by the present leader of the opposition is formed, will not the political leaders of the leftists as well as others mentioned above have some amount of influence within the government to temper the leadership to be reasonably democratic to take important decisions preceded by discussions among the leaders of the different parties of the alliance?

Meanwhile, the strategies of the BNP alliance to win the coming parliamentary polls by hook or by

crook are getting clear. First, they have raised the age of the retirement of judges supposedly with the object of making the chief of the caretaker government a judge they calculate to be most docile and obliging to them. Some call this move of the BNP as unwitting. Kindly make no mistake that BNP is a party that often does not find it necessary to put a mask to hide a devil. Secondly, the BNP has already appointed a judge as the chief election commissioner blatantly ignoring the demands of the opposition political parties for a consensus selection. Thirdly, the BNP has massively politicised the administration and police to use them most in the wake of polls. Fourthly, the BNP has passed a budget for the current fiscal year providing for large allocation for unproductive development works in different constituencies of the alliance MPs. Fifthly, the government has allowed extra-judicial killings by the RAB and police. Though it has created for the time being some sort of relief to the society infested with extortion and criminalisation, the opposition may rightly feel that the gun may be aimed at them in the wake of polls. Sixthly, the identified vandals of the alliance have killed and persecuted the minority, the opposition leaders and activists putting many of them under the bars and yoking to cases in the court of law.

Seventhly, the BNP has steadfastly stooped to the dictates of the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, the adjuncts of the US, to be patted as an obedient boy. The much publicised Bidisha drama has given a rude reminder of to what a length the BNP can go when it is concerned with vote equations. Ninthly, BNP and Jamaat have prepared a huge election budget. Their view is to buy off wholesale the voters by scattering fabulous amount of money among them. They believe that in Bangladesh nothing is beyond money.

The opposition cannot possibly afford to waste further time to forge unity. They should gird up their loins to face the upcoming ordeal. The CPB should weigh the need of the time forgoing traditional trade unionism hangover. The lapse that should not elude attention is that there are enough roars from the opposition on the outline of reforms in the structure of caretaker government and election commission, but it is unfortunate that the opposition has not yet spelled out what service and care they will yield to the people if they come to power. People like to make the grand alliance declare their political agenda like the following in clear terms: loan defaulters, identified terrorists will not be nominated for election; any one proved guilty of corruption will lose his primary membership of the party; no one will be allowed to use religion to mislead and persecute the people; rule of law will be established in all spheres of society; economic wellbeing of the havenots will be assured on top priority basis; politicisation of administration, police, judiciary, educational institutions etc. will be eliminated and so on. In fact, these will act as glue to forming grand alliance as well as attracting the voters.

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Take the cause out of it and terrorism will die naturally

SYED MAQSUD JAMIL

LONDON bombings taking innocent lives shows that terrorism lives in spite of the fall of Saddam, the rout of the Taliban in Afghanistan, and the pacification of West Bank after the election of Mahmood Abbas. And despite the fact that the abetting, conniving and the sanctuary Moslem countries have been brought in to the line. God -- be He a Muslim God (courtesy pastor Billy Graham Jr.), a Christian God or a Jewish God -- calls the killing of innocent human beings as sinful acts.

It is more proper and precise to add "that these are abominably sinful acts of erring Muslims". For every crime, however repugnant it is, has a cause. Life is precious. One can rightly want to know what is that driving force or the sense of desperation working furiously in the minds of the suicide bombers to sacrifice their lives in perpetrating such vicious acts of manslaughter. And in such great numbers, and with such regularity against worldwide vigilance. The facts show that the Arab Muslims are the principal perpetrators of major acts of terrorism in and outside the Arab world. It also raises the question that why a region so rich in resources and ethnically so homogenous should become the theatre of perennial bloodletting, warfare and lately foreign occupation.

Unlike the Arab world, the inter-ethnic trouble in Afghanistan is tribal in nature that raised its head as a legacy of Soviet occupation. Afghanistan had no ground to be linked to international terrorism till Osama relocated his base there. The backlash of twin tower bombing made it a beleaguered country. There is no sign of respite for Afghanistan although Hamid Karzai is enthroned in the confines of Kabul. As for Osama, even the 21st century weaponry of US could not yet flush him out. Now that the Taliban have also

been antagonised beyond repair Afghanistan under the shadow of Osama would continue to haunt the western world. It is equally a matter to ponder why an Osama, a prince of a person in matters of wealth would abandon the life of comfort and convenience to wander in the heights of the ragged tribal terrains of Pak-Afghan border. It may be sheer zealotry, fanaticism or obscurantism but there is definitely a cause that propelled him to become the "turbaned terror".

The servile attitude of the Muslim rulers to the dictates of US and the free rein it gave to the tyranny of Israel in Palestine prompted Osama to take the war to US. Saddam of Iraq can be demonised for all sorts of atrocities committed against his own people. But he was a scourge for the Islamic militants and was a secular ruler building Arab nationalism.

It is saddening that in its simplest term the action of its allies and US in sending troops to oust Saddam's regime on the pretext of destroying WMD is a violation of state sovereignty and territorial integrity. Iraq as a sovereign state has been compromised. Its social compact has broken down with the major ethnic groups jockeying for greater share of power. And the hitherto minor ruling group, the Sunnites, are waging pitched battles and committing waves of suicide bombings splattering everyday of Iraq with the blood of innocent countrymen.

Democracy and liberation from the tyranny of Saddam look so incongruous to ordinary Iraqis in the tragedy of everyday killing marking the presence of US and allied troops. It is over two years since Saddam was toppled and today even the constitutional process looks grounded and this senseless killings look to have come for a long time.

Palestine is the mother of all problems. It is painful that after six major wars in 1948, 1956, 1967, 1973, 1991 and in 2003 that only

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added to the woes of the Palestinians and Arabs, ended up with a "Road Map" that is not making any headway. However, whatever little Ariel Sharon is doing in Gaza strip is a giant leap considering his hawkish past.

An understanding is growing stronger that the Muslims and the Jews, more precisely the Arab Muslims and the Jews are eternal enemies. In furtherance of this belief it is further propagated that the Muslims and naturally the ordinary Arab Muslims also hold America as their principal enemy for its sponsorship of Israel. Woefully the dour look of revered Ayatullah in castigating the US leadership along with the twin tower carnage only helped the demonic characterisation of Muslims to settle deeper in American psyche and also to some extent in the western world. But the realities over the centuries till the shipload arrival of Zionist immigrants in Palestine in the beginning of last 20th century, that increased after Balfour Declaration, speak to the contrary.

History speaks of Jewish people originating from Mesopotamia and settling in Canaan and parts of Transjordan between 1800 and 1500 B.C. Their persecution started with the Babylonian conquest of Judea around 586 B.C. The conquerors exiled a great number of them and thus the first Diaspora of the Jewish people started.

Palestine became a Roman protectorate when the Romans conquered it in support of King Herod. As the Jewish population became restive Roman rulers mercilessly put down Jewish revolts in about AD 70 and AD 132. In AD 135, the Romans drove the Jews out of

Jerusalem. With the rise of Christianity under the Byzantine Empire the Jewish people gradually converted to become Christians. When Jerusalem fell to Caliph Omar in 632 AD he allowed the Christians and the Jews to live in peace and to practice their religion. In course of time Palestine embraced an Islamic-Arab culture.

In sharp contrast to it the Jewish population was subjected to humiliation and discrimination all over Europe. They had to carry an arm badge or a tablet to mark them out as Jews. The only exception was Moorish Spain where the Jews prospered considerably. It ended with the fall of Moorish Spain and the beginning of the rule of King Ferdinand.

During the decline of Ottoman power in 1880 AD the number of Jewish people in Palestine was 24,000 against an Arab population of 400,000. The first Zionist Congress was held in 1897 AD at Basle, Switzerland under the leadership of Theodore Herzl. It envisioned to form a Jewish Homeland in Palestine populated by Jewish people from Europe and all over the world. This was followed by the arrival of Jewish people in shiploads, never taking into consideration the fate of the Arab people.

By 1914, the total population of Palestine stood at about 700,000. About 615,000 were Arabs, and 85,000 to 100,000 were Jews. Under Sykes-Picot agreement in 1916 the British and the French agreed to the partitioning of Palestine. British Foreign Secretary Sir Arthur Balfour lent support to the Zionist cause by declaring on 17 December 1917 that the British government favourably supports the creation of a homeland



Deperate Palestinian youth

in Palestine for the Jewish people protecting the rights of the non-Jewish people. This was British government's response to Jewish American financier Lord Rothschild's request in this matter.

It was also revealed that Russian Jewish émigré scientist Dr. Haim Weisman exerted much influence in the drafting of the text of the declaration by virtue of his position as an eminent scientist helping the British with acetone. In the beginning Sir Balfour offered Uganda as a homeland but Weisman rejected this. Eventually the League of Nations granted trusteeship of Palestine to the British after the fall of Ottoman Empire at the end of World War I. This was formalised in 1922 and the British created 'Agency for Jewish people' that later became the representative body of the Jewish people.

It led to the rise of Jewish terrorist organisations like Haganah, Irgun of

which Menahem Begin was a member. Soon there was a substantial Jewish community in Palestine pushing the Arabs into an embattled community and making the job difficult for the British administrators of Palestine. At the end of World War II the stage was set for the partition of Palestine.

The United Nations General Assembly acting on the recommendation of United Nations Special Commission on Palestine UNSCOP adopted a resolution (GA 181) on 29 November 1947 for the partition of Palestine into an Arab state and Jewish state keeping Jerusalem under international supervision. Understandably the Arabs rejected it and the Jews accepted it US President Harry S. Truman was an active supporter of this resolution. A free-for-all engulfed Palestine after the British left.

The Jewish terrorist organisations

Haganah, Irgun and Lehi started driving the Arabs from their lands. At the time of partition the Arabs owned about half of the Palestinian land, slightly less than half was 'crown land' and the Jewish Agency owned 8 percent land. There were about 0.6 million Jews and 1.2 Arabs in the land of Palestine during partition.

It gave 57 percent of Palestinian land to the Jewish people who constituted only one third of the total population against two third majority of the Arabs. Thousands of Palestinians were evicted from their homes and started living in tents. The Israelis colluded with UK and France in occupying the Sinai in 1956 to reverse the nationalisation of Suez Canal. UN resolution 997 actively supported by USA asked Israel to withdraw from Sinai.

Unfortunately the Arabs did not learn from it the cost of brinkmanship and were humbled in six-day war in 1967. Subsequently UN Security Council binding resolution 242 called for a negotiated settlement and withdrawal of Israel from occupied territories. Israel has defied a number of UN resolutions and particularly the Security Council Resolution 242 and continues to hold on to West Bank, Gaza strip and Golan Heights.

There is a genuine ground for indignation against this double standard. By contrast although Security Council resolution 1441 did not authorise the military mission, the US administration went ahead with its allies in sending troops to Iraq and toppled the government, however evil it may be, of a sovereign state.

Coming to London bombing, one should take note that Islam asks its followers to be steadfast in their beliefs but nowhere it supports or condones dastardly tactics of exacting vengeance by taking the life of an innocent in place of the guilty. Islam glorifies sacrificing life in martyrdom but suicide is not acceptable to it. Even a little understanding of Islam tells us that it prefers open and candid

engagement of the enemy instead of subversion. The world including the Muslims can therefore with all the heart in it condemn terrorist attacks taking innocent lives.

For the Muslims they have another burden to bear of lamenting the religious death of fellow Muslims in suicide bombers. But the west, particularly USA has more to do and have all the powers in the world of ensuring that terrorism dies naturally by taking the cause out of it. Terrorism does not die with the fall of Saddam or by the rout of the Taliban, neither with the capture of Osama nor by breaking the bones of the Palestinians. They are born everyday in the wombs of injustice, in the suppression of rights.

It is deeply saddening that the US which went to war for the emancipation of the Black Americans has allowed itself to be actively engaged with increasing partisanship in sponsoring the injustices which condones the increasing defiance and excesses of the state of Israel, its suppression of the national rights of the Palestinians.

This has placed the Palestinians, the Arabs, the Afghans, the Pakistanis, the Indonesians and the Muslims as an embattled people, as victims of intense and unfair focus of the international media. It is easy for embattled people to fall prey to their anger and desperation. American leadership can play a vital role in bringing an end to this embattled state by addressing the underlying causes of terrorism with fairness and goodwill for all people on the earth. They are a resourceful nation with the whole world as their sphere of influence. The world waits to see whether they have the will for it.

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