Has regime change boomeranged?

M Shahid Alam describes how the ultra-nationalist Americans who saw the tragedy of 9/11 as an opportunity to build a new American empire have met their Waterloo in Iraq



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IN the early 1990s, the fall of the Soviets produced a surge of triumphalism in the US. After defeating the fascist challenge in the 1940s, liberal capitalism had trumped its last adversary, global communism. This triumphalist mood was caught pithily in Francis Fukuyama's claim that mankind -- of course led by the West -- had reached "the end of history."

This quickly produced a global regime change. Within a few years, the capitalist centres stripped most countries in the periphery of the autonomy they had gained in stages, starting in the 1930s. In this latest wave of integration, the periphery would not be "colonized," but Washington would define their economic rules. Most countries in the periphery would now be forced to open their doors to foreign capital, privatize their economy, scrap their plans, and dismantle their welfare systems. In all but name, they began to look like the Open Door economies of the nineteenth century.

US economic dominance, however, was not enough for two segments of the American neo-conservative movement, consisting of ultra-nationalists (Cheney, Rumsfeld and Bolton) and the Zio-cons (Wolfowitz, Feith and Perle), a term coined by James Petras. They wanted the US to take advantage of the unipolar moment -- opened up by the demise of Soviet Union -- to make its political dominance irreversible.

There were two components to the neo-con plan. First, they began to work on plans to extend US military superiority to a point where no potential rival would dare to challenge its hegemony in any region of the world. In violation of international laws, the US would enforce its total hegemony by waging preventive wars against any country that acted contrary to its economic or political interests.

This military plan would first be tested in the Middle East. This is what brought the ultra-nationalists and the Zio-cons together. They first wanted to take complete control of the world's oil spigot in order to destroy OPEC and hold Europe, Japan and China at ransom. The Zio-cons wanted to destroy the few remaining centres of resistance to Israeli hegemony in the Middle East -- Iraq, Iran and Syria.

But these plans had to be put on hold. President Bill Clinton was not ready to fully embrace their plans, even though his war and sanctions against Iraq prepared the base on which the