the endgame has started but has a few years left. In 2004, US scenario planners penciled in 2015 as a likely date. They may well be bringing that date forward.

One could also cite parallels with Vietnam and Cambodia in the mid-seventies. Abandoned by the Americans, pro-western elites fell or fled. The spectre of the US bailing out and abandoning its allies is real and is concentrating minds in the Pakistani military. The US has already miscalculated badly in Iraq and Afghanistan. Could it not do so again with a strike on Iran? With its economy falling off a cliff, the US political establishment could easily call a halt to the adventure. It has happened before, and will do so again.

With this background, who can guarantee that the soldiers will continue to fight their cousins within the country, on behalf of Washington's strategic imperatives? The new Pakistan army chief signals that he is willing to do so. For how long can he ensure his troops shed blood for Punjabi domination, I wonder?

Back to Dhaka

Not so long ago, it was laughable to write about the Maoist upsurge in Nepal . I did so and was criticised when I said it was only a matter of time before they prevailed. Well, they are in the ascendancy. Certainly, very few expected the king to fall from grace so easily. He has, despite enormous American (and Indian) backing. Why not Pakistan too?

Dhaka will have to adapt to a changed geo-political environment in the second decade. I am sure radical Islamic groups understand this very well. They will know better than I the durability or otherwise of pro-western elites in Pakistan and Afghanistan. A decapitated Pakistan works both ways for them. Much of the complacent elite here however always think they can "handle" these forces and will watch in shock when the inevitable happens in the western half of the sub-continent.

The more progressive elements of the elite should do more than sit back and watch the spectacle. They need to work out an alternative orientation which breaks from colonial history up to 1971 and that takes into account the ground realities as they exist today. What sense does it make to tilt towards Pakistan in the few years left before what remains of that country implodes?

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