

Hillary rebounds

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SENATOR McCain wins the Republican nomination; Senator Clinton opens the race for Democratic ticket as comeback kid.

In the battleground last Tuesday Senator Obama's frontal assault on Senator Hillary Clinton appeared halted. She won delegate rich Texas and Ohio and also Rhode Island. Hillary's comeback stunned many observers who are keen to call upon her to throw in the towel early and quit. She has been the most popular politician for years; was never been a glibble personality; always a relentless fighter on issues and causes that earned her many enemies and made her somewhat vulnerable.

The frontrunner status for long has allowed enemies to regroup to challenge her dream. The gender fear prompted her to declare early that exposed her for long to fires from all direction. The rise of Obama was meteoric and somewhat unexpected. Senator Obama is the silver bullet for the enemies of Hillary.

With losses in 12 states in a row, she was sluggish and bleeding nervously. Obama mania was spreading: the danger was real. Many doubted Maggie Williams's ability to stop hemorrhage and energize the campaign for the delegate rich states of Texas, Ohio and everything. Even Latino rich state Texas had only fifty-fifty chance while she needed minimum 57% votes in both Ohio with 141 delegates and Texas 194, to remain afloat.

With Rhode Island, Texas and Ohio for Hillary she has turned crisis into opportunity. Ohio has become a classic state; in a sense the win in Ohio has won 11 presidential races in a row. Hillary campaign is certainly energized but still with fewer delegates than Obama, far from assured, which Larry King of CNN dubbed as ding-dong race. It is now going to be a hand to hand combat for every delegate.

Senator Clinton has not been a kitchen-in-charge First lady of the White House. She fought relentlessly on universal health care, widened the safety net but much is still left to be done. As president she will have one last opportunity to fulfill her promise. The rich and affluent fear her presidency will tax their pocket for universal social security and healthcare. Even the rich don't like to pay tax. The Democrat, already known as big spenders, Hillary will ask for bigger budget for the poor if elected. 'Stop Hillary' is the battle cry of the rich and affluent.

She has been fighting for the choice over the unborn which is extremely unpopular with the churches and conservatives. Hillary's presidency will be a defeat for the crusaders of pro-life. The cost of choice will be an additional burden on health care. She may be unstoppable once nominated: the moralists, conservatives and rich are all out fighting advance guard battle to stop her nomination. There is a considerable macho arrogance who thinks women are unfit for war and the White House. Many veterans did

not like Bill Clinton for dodging the Vietnam War. They too are not showing enthusiasm for Hillary. They would much rather vote for Obama than Hillary.

The sulking Democrats of the Clinton presidency are also asking for their pound of flesh. More than a decade as governor of Arkansas and eight years in the White House, an army of Bill's political enemies are lurking for blood. Even the powerful families are out to see Clinton's don't outshine theirs.

The Kennedys have endorsed Obama; Shivers did the same, John Kerry too, so also the granddaughter of President Dwight Eisenhower. Radio, TV, news papers - the whole world of media, is in frenzied state for Obama along with entertainment icons like Oprah Winfrey. When the media discovered a Rambo in Obama; the apparently more popular Hillary appeared most embarrassed.

Bush presidency is in the doldrums due to failure to achieve goals in the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, latest worries being the economy plunging into recession. With the kind of performance, Republicans have little hope of retaining the White House. The Republican contender is not likely to last long in the ring; knockout strategy is their best hope. To their satisfaction the vital job comes from Democratic 'golden child' - Senator Obama.

A powerful pen and very persuasive voice, the greenhorn Obama turned into celebrity overnight; getting iconic response from younger voters, African-

Americans, rich, independents, and of course masked Republicans. Politics is the art of possibility; Republicans traditionally play the game better.

The populist Democrats characterize in diversity and accommodation, no wonder; their choice is between a woman and an African-American. The brilliant Obama is every inch a politician with the articulation of a poet and hypnotic delivery of a magician the maestro has already shattered many facts into fiction. No one knows the substance but Obama is selling lorry-load of hope; he is instantly convincing. It was Obama carnival; even white males were joining in droves.

But the rhetoric seems to have brought to a halt by experience. Clinton has the experience and the audacity of a leader in crisis that made her a heroin in the Lewinsky affair. She has created a doubt if Senator Obama has confidence of the majority Americans to reach the White House and the experience to function as president. That I suppose, has made comeback possible.

Bush administration has done little. The next president's main foreign policy focus will be in the Middle East; Palestinian-Israel accord that was almost signed at Camp David during Bill Clinton's time needs vigorous renewal. Between pro war McCain and anti war Barack Obama, Hillary has the middle ground. Economy that Bill left in surplus 7 years ago is under sub-prime disaster and in the grip of recession; refusing to respond despite lower interest rate stimulant. Americans appeared to have



a late awakening that Hillary is the rightful inheritor of those golden legacies. She is finally selling 'there is no time for rhetoric or on-the-job training'. Republicans earnestly wanted Obama who they feel is 'defeatable'.

McCain has the nomination now but is caught up lately in sexual scandal with young lobby-

ist Vicki Iseman. Line of worries is visible in Republican camp too.

The magic number of 2025 delegates is still 500 plus away for the democratic ticket. If the race for the nomination hangs on to 796 super delegates at the National Democratic Convention by the end of August, split and emotion between the Obama and

Hillary camps will be too wide and too late to heal before the November election. If Hillary wins nomination by a split decision at the convention, African-Americans and youths, emotionally charged might be too heartbroken to vote. That's where the strategy of the Republicans and Hillary haters are converging.

Unless Hillary can unite the emotionally divided party or Obama can make happen hitherto unthinkable, the race for the White House may once again turn into a nightmare for the Democrats.

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The perils of the 'Great Game'



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THE 'Great Game' planned towards the end of nineteenth century was aimed at challenging the nineteenth century belief that 'European Civilization had its beginning in Middle East' and to establish global supremacy of Europeans. The European powers at that time believed that they could change the Muslim majority Asia in the very fundamentals of its political existence, and in their attempt to do so introduced an artificial state system into the Middle East that has made its way into a region of countries, many of which have not become nations by definition even today.

Religion, which was the basis of political life in the Middle East, was called into question by the Russians who proposed communism, and by the British who proposed nationalism or dynastic loyalty in its place, while the French championed one sect against the others and that too, is an issue kept alive, notably in the communal strife in Lebanon, Syria and Iraq. Intrigues and plays were on cards to set the various clans of the Middle East on collision courses.

When oil was not an important factor it was believed that Muslims and Jews were natural allies and, on the other hand, the French and the Arabs were dangerous enemies of the Zionist movement. Between mid to end of the twentieth century, many needless and endless wars were fought between Israel and her neighbors which snowballed into major wars in the '50s and '70s of the twentieth century involving major actors of the region.

Meanwhile, Britain commenced putting in place her plan mapped in 1922 which was to destroy the old order in the region. The crisis of political imbroglio of the Middle East grew not only from the distortion of existing order but also from the lack of conviction about the 'modus operandi' to impose the settlement plan of 1922 to which she was pledged. The failed bid to impose the plan led the British to modify or revamp the strategy so that its imperial ambition did not end in fiasco. The British strategist decided to craft an enduring plan to dominate sealand to India, which served as the backbone of Britain's economy. They thought that to save the 'Sea Empire' from uninterrupted back and forth movement from British Isles to India, no government along the sea-lane should be hostile to her.

A sudden spurt of nationhood saw the exit of the monarchies friendly to Britain, at times by violent means that had almost hampered the British dream design. Meanwhile, a steady growth of the demand 'fuel for energy' was observed among the growing industrial nations and urgency was intensely felt to dominate the major source of energy, petrol. It was interesting to note how loyalty shifted from partisan interest from one power block to another.

Many pacts were designed to accommodate long-term strategy to maintain energy flow without which industries would shut down. The race for control of the energy source saw a split among the erstwhile strategic partners. Religion, which formed the basis of nationhood in the Middle East in the past, once again tiptoed to

the centre stage of the political culture, which was not relished by USA and her allies.

The allies quickly moved to sow the seed of sectarian difference and pitted one Muslim nation against another. The allies very skillfully raised groups to oppose the governments and funded handsomely to stage coup d'état successfully.

Insularity persisted in the region for quite a while which resulted into hijacking and limited terrorism. One alleges that western sources funded the rise of the militant groups in the garb of organizing groups to oppose the rise of a relatively new political culture (communism). Gradually some of these groups grew into strong force to challenge the government and this snowballed to fuel fratricidal campaign among the nations of the region. This brought in power brokers to play their role to pave the way for 'peace' but apparently their bid failed.

Nationalists all over the world complained of their insincerity while brokering peace, as they wanted to fish in troubled water, an intriguing act indeed. This revelation has turned people at large into passive, agitated and insatiable state, a fatal configuration that had put into jeopardy all endeavours to catch up with the elusive peace. After over-coming post colonial hangover, the Muslim nations across the globe got down to settling themselves by forsaking hatred with a view to restoring peace and crafted a road map to peace and development.

When these nations were at work towards this end, they were silently robbed of their pursuit by western nations who, through instigations,

put one Muslim nation against another in the Middle East. Fratricidal wars were fought which denuded them of their wealth and forced them into selling their oil cheap to help restore their postwar abysmal economy. Realizing that they were being fooled by the vested quarters, a fierce nationalism grew which made power blocks to rethink and redesign their exploitation strategy. Allegedly, the growing nationalists were arming themselves to assail their adversaries that were power block's strategic partners.

The power blocks with partisan media support sensitized their partners about the need to abort the efforts of nations that wanted to assert their sovereignty alleging that these nations if allowed to act independently will destroy peace in the Middle East and deprive west of the much needed oil. So the west got busy to garner support primarily of the non-Muslim countries. Even if some of the Muslim nations had tacit support for operations brokered and proposed by the west, they could not expose themselves for fear of being isolated.

The UN was bypassed and world was made to preside over the destruction of a sovereign nation by the allies, most of whom were supplied with 'doctored' intelligence. The battle was won by the allies without facing any resistance as Iraq opted to save the life and property of her citizens. The allies thought that 'the war was over' but it turned out to be a farce.

The lies that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction (WMD) made many otherwise peace loving countries to support the allies' campaign but were baffled when they found that there were no WMD. The world sympathized with the families of innocent dead Iraqis who died at the instance of allies' intransigence. The post war estimate of Iraqi casualties is a few times more than the number of people dead or wounded during Saddam's dreadful regime. One does not see any possibility of peace settling not only Iraq which is dropped into darkness for shortage of power.

The US and her western allies' hope to control oil wealth might diminish as the Arab nations realize the need to reinvent and start asserting themselves after forcing the US allies to withdraw from the Middle East. Graffiti on the wall clearly reads that there is no moral high ground for the allies to subvert the march to peace for its own vested interest. Western effort to make 'peace' in the Middle East seems to be ending peace in hitherto peaceful regions.

Billions of dollars invested to keep the West's war effort alive is making poor people elsewhere in the world poorer as those countries are being pressurized to foot their war bill. When the world realized that the threat of WMD was a hoax, they refused to pay the bills that were spent for killing those that spoke for peace for themselves. The people of the world should wake up now or never; save the world from the self-styled policemen of peace lest the killing of innocents should rule the roost. This will also help the humanist desire to encourage all of us human beings to say 'I too belong' to this world despite diversity in religion, culture and unequal distribution of wealth.

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Russia's new President: Will policy change?

BARRISTER HARUN UR RASHID

PRESIDENT Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin (55) has ruled eight years from 2000. Under his regime Russia's image has been one of strong, assertive and powerful. He nominated Dmitri Anatolevich Medvedev (42), a former First Deputy Prime Minister, as President.

Medvedev was duly elected on 2nd March as the President with 70.2 per cent of the vote. His opponents Gennadi Zyuganov of the Communist Party secured almost 18 per cent and the ultranationalist Liberal Democratic Party candidate Vladimir Zhirinovskiy 9 per cent of the total vote. It is reported that the turnout of voters was 67 per cent.

After the victory, Medvedev who wore a casual dress (a black leather jacket and blue jeans) reportedly said: "Despite this quite unpleasant snow falling from the skies, this is a very special day in the life of the country."

At a news conference on 3rd March, Medvedev offered assurances that he and Putin would govern Russia together, saying they had long known and trusted each other. Their relationship "will become a rather positive factor in the development of our country," Medvedev said.

Putin reportedly said: "I thank all our citizens who came to polls. This means that we live in a democratic state and our civil society is becoming efficient, responsible and active." Some say Putin's comment is directed to Western countries which accuse Putin of authoritarianism and lack of democracy in Russia.

Putin & Medvedev
Medvedev's father Anatoly, taught at the Institute of Technology, while his mother, Yulia, taught language and literature at the Gertsen Institute. He comes from a different family background than that of Putin, although both Putin and Medvedev come from St.

Petersburg. Both are lawyers. Putin worked in KGB while Medvedev did not.

Putin, for majority of Russians, will enter history as a positive figure. Russia's political and economic instability has disappeared, and Russia grew rich with rising oil and gas prices which contribute 20% of its GDP. Russia's GDP now stands at \$1.3 trillion, (less than \$200 billion in 1999) and its economy grew at 8 per cent in 2007.

Most importantly, observers say Putin gave his people faith in tomorrow. He differed with Western countries on many issues and asserted Russia's diplomatic and military muscle which the Russians appreciated.

Putin will work as Prime Minister under President Medvedev. In a speech before the Russian State Council, Putin presented a list of ambitious goals for Russia, the reawakening superpower -- not just for the present, but for a period extending well into the future, until 2020.

In doing so, he laid out a long-term plan. Analysts believe in 2012, after a four-year interregnum with Medvedev as President, Putin, who would be 59 by then, would be eligible to serve two additional terms as President.

Will Russia change under Medvedev?

For sometime Medvedev will be under the watchful eye of Putin whose position as Prime Minister ensures continuity. It is a question whether the new President who is nominated by Putin is to preserve the status quo or whether the choice of Putin in selecting Medvedev has been a mistake if he departs from the policy of Putin, time only will tell.

Analysts believe Moscow's current game of chess over political positions revolves around the question of who will be in charge, in the long term, of the world's largest country by landmass.

Who will determine what happens with the country's vast oil, gas

and diamond resources, its gold and foreign currency reserves worth almost half a trillion dollars, the world's second-largest nuclear weapons arsenal and poison cupboards full of intelligence files?

In Russia the duties of Prime Minister are purely administrative. It is not known whether Medvedev will share some powers with Prime Minister Putin. If so, in which areas will they share power?

Medvedev will soon join the world leaders at the G-8 summits to debate the global financial crisis, Kosovo's independence and the Iranian nuclear program (on March 4 Russia scuttled a resolution in IAEA against Iran proposed by the West). Will he express new approach to all these issues including his views on installation of missile surveillance equipment in Poland and the Czech Republic by the US?

Medvedev has been calling for a stronger emphasis on the rule of law, the market economy and freedom of the press. Many say he has been talking like Gorbachev who was largely responsible for the collapse of Soviet Russia.

Nobody knows Medvedev's real goals and values. He was never a public politician, although he is perceived as liberal, cultured, moderate and even pro-Western. As a young man he reportedly fought for democracy on the side of his boss, the mayor of St. Petersburg Anatoly Sobchak.

Whether Medvedev emerges as a new Gorbachev is impossible to say at this moment. It all depends whether he is able to build an alliance of forces that will allow him to put his own men on strategic positions as to change the policies pursued by Putin.

Political observers say that Medvedev will have to deal with certain problems within Russia, namely, (a) the failure to modernize industry or agriculture, (b) the growing corruption in the country, (c) drunkenness of Russians, (d) the record number of murders and suicides, (e) the inadequate state of

health care and (f) a shrinking population.

After the victory of Medvedev, Gorbachev echoed similar sentiment when he said that Russia needed to move on the path of modernization. He underscored the need "to modernize governance, create an innovative economy, re-emphasise education, and health, and as top priority, work to narrow the gap between rich and poor".

Observers say that much of Medvedev's efforts are expected to be spent on these issues if Russia wants admiration from Western countries. Russia may get it if it becomes at par in providing services to its citizens compared to those in Western countries.

Searching for a new world order

Some US writers hold the view that the power of the US has peaked and with the rise of Europe and Asia, it becomes clear that America's unipolar moment is not long for this world.

While the US is clearly too strong to stay on the sidelines of world affairs, it is too weak to implement an agenda without wide international support. That is why the US had to negotiate with North Korea and seems to be powerless to stop Iran's nuclear program.

Some say that the world order is in transition because there is no power at the moment including the US that can force an issue to its wishes and satisfaction.

An awkward truth is that the world is neither dominated by a unipolar power nor multipolar powers. It is a non-polar world and the balance of power is going through an evolution period.

The current fluidity in the balance of power carries a serious threat of instability and conflict as well as concerns over how to build an effective international response to abuses of power.

US Strategy toward Russia
Against the background, the election of Medvedev as the new President affords an opportunity to review America's strategy towards Russia. It should be realized that there is broad-based support in Russia for the direction in which Putin has taken his country whether the West likes it or not.

Washington may realize that Russia's resurgence and muscle is not temporary. Russia, China and the European Union appear not to be comfortable with the unipolar world led by the US.

The sooner the US understands that the role of Russia should be seen as a positive factor in world affairs, the better it is for the world. There is no point for relations between Moscow and Washington to worsen. Medvedev reportedly said: "It is necessary that the US and Russia cooperate. It is inevitable." But many in Moscow have their doubts that the new president will become the country's real leader.

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