

# Iraq Redux?

## The growing, scary US sabre-rattling against Iran



FOR those of us who lived in the US through the horrendous build-up to the 2003 illegal war on Iraq, the growing sabre rattling in the United States against Iran brings a nasty feeling of déjà vu.

Consider the facts. US President Donald Trump unilaterally withdrew from a historic multilateral international nuclear agreement with Iran. Few dispute that Iran was complying with the accord.

So here we are, presented with an incredible situation where the US wakes up one fine morning and decides to walk out of an international agreement which it had committed to abide by. Why? Not because any of the parties have violated it. It's because the US did not like the terms of the agreement after the fact. This is essentially mafia-style arm-twisting replacing international diplomacy.

"Since May 2018, the Trump administration has withdrawn from the major powers agreement that curbed Iran's nuclear programme, re-imposed punishing sanctions on Tehran, demanded that allies choose between Iranian oil and doing business in the American market, and declared the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps a terrorist organisation," *The New York Times* wrote recently.

Tensions have ratcheted up even more. The Associated Press reports that "the US ordered all nonessential personnel to leave Iraq, and last week an aircraft carrier group and other resources were shifted to the Persian Gulf region. In public and in private, officials are sticking by the administration's warnings of serious threats from Iranian-backed forces in the region."

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo was in Europe trying to whip up support. To nobody's surprise, the response has not



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PHOTO: ATTA KENARE/AFP

been enthusiastic. It's not easy to convince anybody outside the fevered swamps of US warmongering paranoia that up is down.

Pompeo "heard very clearly...from us, not only from myself but also from the other ministers of EU members states, that...the most responsible attitude to take...should be that of maximum restraint," EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini told reporters after a meeting of EU ministers in Brussels. That's diplomatic parlance for: "Go jump in the lake."

Mercifully, the sabre rattling today is a far cry from the growing chorus in support of the war for Iraq. It is easy to forget that at that time, the war had substantial support of

Democrats including subsequent Democratic presidential candidates Hillary Clinton and John Kerry (both of whom later recanted.) Like any time the US prepares for a foreign misadventure, the war hysteria was amplified by a media frenzy. Iraqi strongman Saddam Hussein was painted as the devil incarnate. Now nobody thinks Saddam Hussein is Santa Claus, but moral outrage against the Iraqi ruler does strain credulity, coming as it does from a global hegemon whose satraps over the years include a veritable rogues gallery of tyrants.

Yet here is the great irony today. Unlike President George W Bush, the architect of the 2003 Iraq war, Trump has been wary about US military misadventures. He has (rightly)

lambasted Bush for the Iraq disaster. He has an instinctive gut recognition of intense public dislike for foreign wars where the benefits, if any, are ephemeral but the cost is terrible for the US in terms of human misery and resources. He has pushed back against US military involvement in Syria and Afghanistan.

But is Trump really calling the shots? What's really scary about US Iran policy is the man who is at the catbird seat: John Bolton. "War drums are beating louder in Washington's long-festering standoff with Iran and National Security Advisor John Bolton, a veteran champion of regime change, is the bandmaster," *Agence France Presse* reports, tongue-in-cheek.

Bolton has never met a war he didn't like. His views are so whacky that in 2006 he was considered manifestly unsuited for the position of US envoy to the United Nations even by a Republican-controlled US Senate, which refused to confirm him.

"Looking at the escalating (US-created) crisis with Iran, one thing I realise is that a lot of people do not quite know who John Bolton is," writes Josh Marshall, editor of the popular political analysis website *Talking Points Memo*. "Bolton is...a comically caricatured militarist, an extremely effective and smart bureaucratic player and entirely capable of lying the country into war or playing on the enthusiasms and insecurities of an ignorant president."

That would be a disaster, according to David Frum, who coined the famous (or infamous, according to my view) phrase "axis of evil" for Bush to describe Iran, Iraq and North Korea. Frum backed the Iraq war, but regrets it today.

He wrote in *The Atlantic*: "In 2019, the US is the international scofflaw. It ripped up a multilateral nuclear arms-control agreement with Iran. Whatever that treaty's deficiencies, few inside the US—and nobody outside it—deny that Iran complied with its terms...(US plans military action,) but where's the casus belli here? What declared-in-advance US red lines has Iran tripped? Any US military action will look to the world like a bolt-from-the-blue act of aggression. It will look that way for the excellent reason that it's precisely what it would be."

Lawfare, the legal commentary website, once remarked that the Trump administration was characterised by "malevolence tempered by incompetence".

For the sake of Iran, international amity and not least of all, the US, that incompetence would be a Godsend now, since good sense or even simple human decency seems in such short supply.

Ashfaque Swapan is a contributing editor for *Siliconer*, a monthly periodical for South Asians in the United States.

# ANC's unconvincing election victory: Legacy of the apartheid regime



THE first half of May saw the South African general elections making headlines in all of the major international news channels.

From political analysts to economists, everyone was having their say about the difficult path the African National Congress (ANC), especially its leader Cyril Ramaphosa, was having to navigate to win people's vote. The reason?

Twenty-five years after the end of apartheid, South Africa still remains one of the most unequal countries in the world. With imbalanced land distribution, high unemployment, rising poverty and numerous allegations of corruption against the ANC government which has ruled South Africa since 1994, the party was having a hard time convincing the voters, especially the "free born", to vote for them. And although they won the elections, thanks to the personal popularity of the party's leader and presidential candidate, Ramaphosa and his promises of change, the victory was marred by the fact that the ANC won with just 58 percent of the votes, shy of the 60 percent the party had managed to secure in all the previous elections, since 1994.

It is fair to ask why the ANC is losing its popularity in a society that it had shaped through its anti-apartheid revolution. The answer might lie in the extractive and exploitative institutions that had

been built in South Africa by the settlers, to suppress the native. The end of the apartheid in 1994, saw the fall of the exploitative rulers, but it seems the extractive institutions built by them are still feeding off the South African economy and its dispossessed communities.

The enactment of the Natives Land Act in 1913 by the settlers ensured that the country was divided into two parts: a rich, prosperous part to be entitled to the white elites; and a poor, backward part, where the black community

could be confined. What is astonishing is that according to the act, "87 percent of the land was to be given to the Europeans, who represented about 20 percent of the population. The remaining 13 percent was to go to the Africans."

Disproportionate distribution of land still remains a thorny issue among the blacks. In present day South Africa, the whites, who make up for only 8.2 percent of the population own 72 percent of agricultural holdings and farms. Despite the well-intentioned "willing-

seller, willing-buyer" programme of the government, to give land back to the blacks, little has improved for black communities.

However, the Natives Land Act was not the only exploitative institution the apartheid regime had established to assert their supremacy. Through the 1953 Bantu Education Act, the apartheid regime made sure that the native black population was completely deprived of education. The act was aimed at making sure no investment was made by the South African state in black schools so that

the blacks could make no economic gain from the benefits of education.

Regarding the Bantu Education Act, Hendrik Verwoerd, one of the architects of the apartheid regime, in a 1954 speech said, "There is no place for him [the Bantu] in the European community above the level of certain forms of labour...For that reason it is to no avail to him to receive a training which has as its aim absorption in the European community while he cannot and will not be absorbed there."

And as early as 1904, the whites had created a job reservation mechanism, that, in one fell swoop, disbarred the blacks from taking up any skilled job in the growing mining economy, with the goal of making sure that they remained the source of cheap labour for the mine owners. Even to this day, racial disparity remains a key reason behind the rising unemployment in the country. According to 2018 economic data of South Africa, unemployment remains the highest among black people at 30.4 percent; while it is the lowest among the white populace at 7.6 percent.

The ANC government's inability to generate sufficient jobs, lack of skilled manpower among the black South Africans, lack of geographically proportionate job opportunities, underdeveloped transportation system along with high cost of travelling are some of the key issues that have led to the rising levels of unemployment in South Africa, especially among the blacks, reinforcing systematic inequality that remains extent throughout South African society, sowing seeds of discontent.

A 2015 research has revealed that of the 30.4 million South Africans

living in poverty in 2015, 9 in every 10 were black. And poverty has increased in the last few years, meaning more and more black people are being pushed below the poverty line, despite having toppled the apartheid regime 25 years earlier.

Disenchanted by the prevailing economic disparities between the blacks and the whites, disillusioned by the ANC's inability to live up to its promises of change while facing allegations of rampant corruption, many free born South Africans feel it is time for them to elect a new government, which will be more transparent in their governance process and more active in implementing the much-required reforms. The elder voters, who have been a part of the movement against apartheid, though, are still sympathetic towards the ANC, which might explain the 58 percent majority the party has managed to secure in the recent national elections, despite its dwindling popularity.

Could it be that even after 25 years post-apartheid, the extractive institutions established by the apartheid regime, are hindering the growth of South Africa? Could these pernicious institutions be still acting as enablers of corruption, facilitating the elites to prosper at the cost of the still dispossessed natives?

Many see the victory of ANC in last week's election as the party's last chance to bring in real change. But amidst all the election campaign rhetoric, and all the promises of prosperity, can the new President of South Africa get rid of these decades-old exploitative institutions, to usher in a new era of prosperity for all?

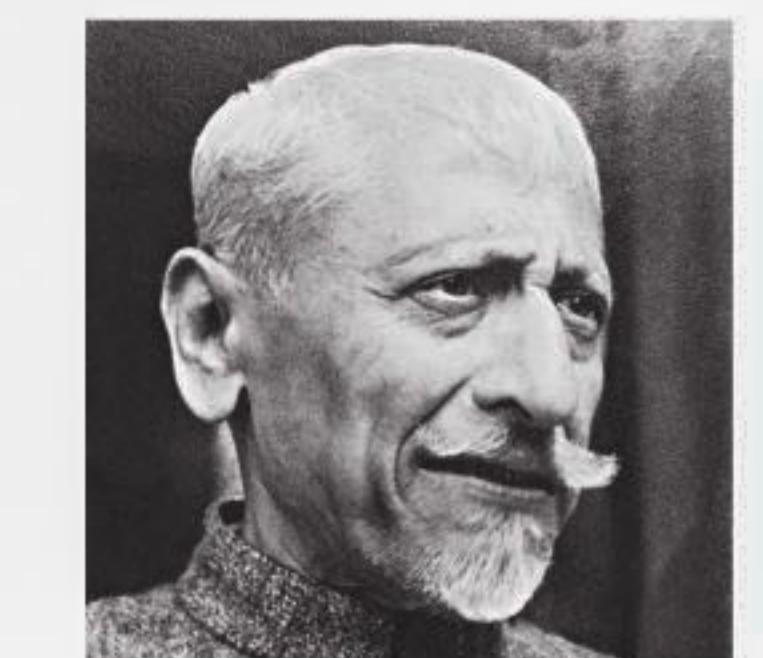
Tasneem Tayeb works for *The Daily Star*. Her Twitter handle is: @TayebTasneem



South African President Cyril Ramaphosa greeted voters before casting his ballot at a primary school in Soweto.

PHOTO: MICHELE SPATARI/AFP

### QUOTABLE Quote



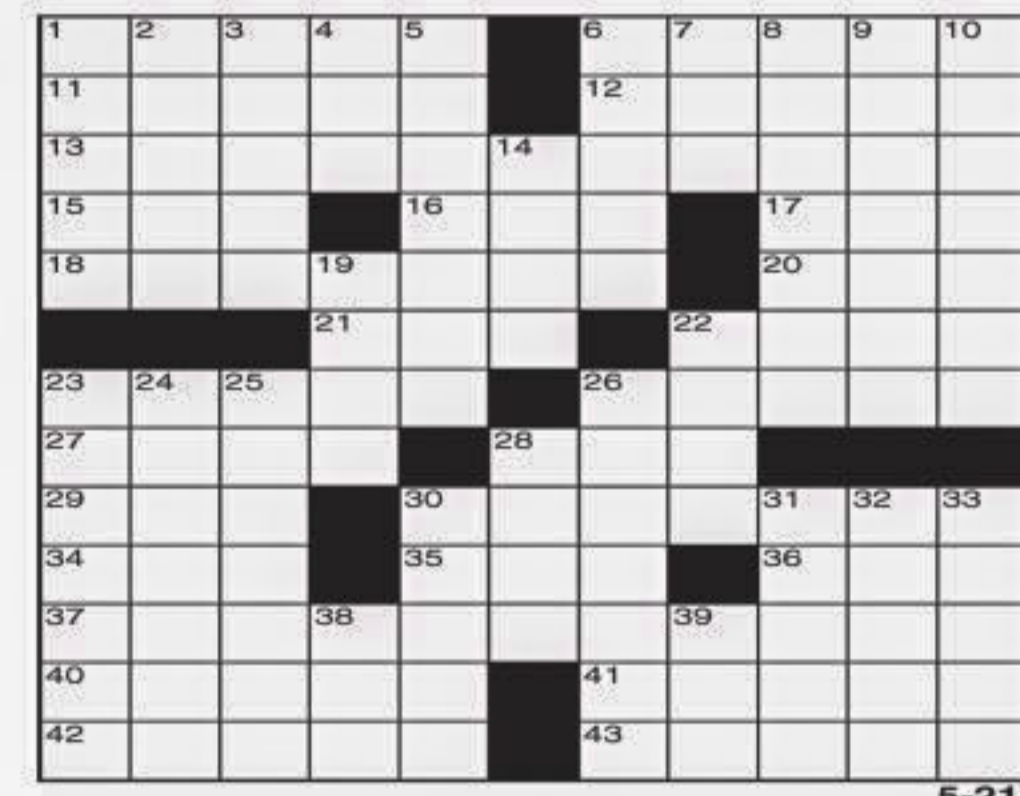
MAULANA ABUL KALAM AZAD

(INDIAN SCHOLAR, ACTIVIST AND POLITICIAN)

Teaching by tongue can be perspired but by good deed can stay stronger.

### CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- Across**
  - 1 Weather aid
  - 6 Fragrant wood
  - 11 "Hello" Singer
  - 12 Like Gymnasts
  - 13 Hunting and fishing
  - 15 Danson of "The Good Place"
  - 16 Stage Signal
  - 17 Sock part
  - 18 Discontinue for now
  - 20 Charged particle
  - 21 They hold power
  - 22 Tenant's fee
  - 23 Useful skill
  - 26 Gold-loving king
  - 27 Blacken
  - 28 Cow call
  - 29 Motor part
  - 30 Racer, for example
  - 34 Valuable rock
  - 35 Fireplace it
  - 36 Top card
  - 37 Killjoys
  - 40 Relates
  - 41 Silver bar
  - 42 Walk like a crab
  - 43 Animated characters
  - Down**
    - 1 Pool floats
    - 2 Parting word
    - 3 Title papers
    - 4 The works
    - 5 Minimal money
    - 6 Like Batman
    - 7 Swelled head
    - 8 Besmirched
    - 9 Pennsylvania city
    - 10 Bristles at
    - 14 Phoenix team
    - 19 Docking site
    - 22 Uprising
    - 23 Approaches hostilely
    - 24 Wrinkly dog
    - 25 "Nothing new," when repeated
    - 26 Slam-dancing site
    - 28 Physics amount
    - 30 Untrue
    - 31 Boat's load
    - 32 Take, as advice
    - 33 Kicks back
    - 38 Ailing
    - 39 Music's Yoko



### YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

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