

**IRAQ: SOME SERIOUS CONCERNS**

In spite of a strong reaction at home, loud protests and demonstrations in most capitals of the world and disapproval of any unilateral action by international fora, the two powerful nations formed a military coalition and inflicted large casualties in terms of lives of men, women and children besides causing huge material destruction. Iraq government that had been in position for more than three decades was ousted and a new government installed under a nominee leadership of the coalition partners. There is no denying the fact that the Baath Party Government in Iraq under the leadership of Saddam Hussein was guilty of a serious crime and violation of international norms when it made attempts to annex the neighbouring Kuwait. The worldwide condemnation of the Saddam government was followed by eviction of Iraqi forces from all occupied territories. The action had approval of the United Nations. This year, American and British military alliance attacked Iraq to end the dictatorship of Saddam. Erstwhile political and administrative leadership is reported to be missing. In the absence of any government and even a skeletal administration, anti-social elements resorted to open loot of public property. It may take some time to establish a credible and effective law and order machinery. The happenings in Iraq leave a host of unanswered questions and raise matters of serious concern.

*First*, under a situation when one neighbour invades another 'who shall have the authority to set right the wrong'? One answer would be the United Nations. If in 1990 Iraq was guilty of violation of the well established international boundaries a similar charge would hold good against the American and British coalition now. The seriousness of the charge is more as the coalition undertook the military operations while the international community in general and the United Nations in particular had warned them against undertaking any such unilateral action. It is indeed tragic that the very nations who played a key role in establishment of the United Nations are found guilty of denigrating and make it irrelevant.

*Second*, the declared twin objectives of the military action were to (i) locate and destroy nuclear, chemical and biological weapons stored by Iraq, and (ii) liquidate dictatorship of the Baath Party and Saddam Hussein to pave way for establishment of a genuine democratic government in Iraq. The Chief U.N. Weapons Inspector (Hans Blix) had reported that

Iraq did no more possess weapons of mass destruction. The U.N. Inspectors did not find any evidence to show existence of such weapons or stores. The British and the American leadership, however, kept accusing Iraq of heinous crimes and potential that posed serious threat to humanity. This they claim was based on their own intelligence system that was more reliable and highly sophisticated. It is difficult to deny that the coalition's joint technological capabilities of hardware and software are immense. They would have had the capacity to scan each inch of Iraqi land to locate any weapon of mass destruction. The capacity to hit precise targets accurately was proved beyond all doubt. After weeks of occupation, however, nothing of the alleged stock piles has been found. Why did the coalition continue to assert that Iraq possessed large quantities of the weapons of mass destruction? Was this a tutored conclusion or a deliberately projected ghost to justify their military action? This will remain an open question. In a similar manner, Iraq was accused of encouraging terrorists and providing shelter and organising training camps to organisations like Al-Qaeda. The coalition occupation forces have yet to find any evidence of the operation of any Al-Qaeda like organisation.

*Third*, the objective of ending the dictatorship in Iraq cannot be the task of any other country – how-so-ever powerful it might be. Nature of the political systems has to be determined by the people themselves. No one from outside has the right to install a new political system. In any case, what is dictatorship? And who can pronounce such a judgement? How many dictatorships already exist? Will the U.S. and U.K. police the working of political systems in different countries and affect changes? What is the political or moral authority for such an action?

*Fourth*, in projecting the oppression by Baath Party it was repeatedly asserted that Sunni population, though in a minority, dominated the vast majority of the Shia population. It was under such a belief that the coalition forces expected a warm welcome in Basra, Karbala and other centres of Shia concentrations. This again proved to be an assumption without much substance. Resistance to the coalition forces was the maximum and fierce at Basra and Karbala. A Shia-Sunni divide did not exist. Attempts are being made to administer the well known 'divide and rule' policy in Iraq but there seems little evidence of its success. One should hope that people of the region would not get fragmented on the basis of religion or sect. Would the secular character of Iraq survive and get further strengthened? This is a serious question. The nominee government installed in Baghdad would, without any doubt, a puppet government. Historically, puppet governments do not last long. Further, these governments have to draw their information from people who wish to

take advantage of their closeness to people in authority. They invariably have no roots in their own system. Their advice, naturally, would be a misplaced one. Situations are very soon created when externally nominated governments have to use force to make people accept their view point. Puppet governments therefore end up as real dictatorships. There is thus always a threat of revolt and attempts at sabotage. Political instability breeds hatred against the aggressors. No other region knows of it more than the Middle-East. The experience of Latin American countries can also not be ignored while discussing Iraq.

*Fifth*, the last decade witnessed a drastic change in the relative importance of the electronic media *vis-a-vis* the print one. The power of electronic media was never doubted; but its capacity and power to spread misinformation could only be grasped in the recent military operations of the coalition. The electronic media is dominated by a few western channels like the CNN, BBC and Star and their reach is global. Due to wide networking, huge financial base and lucrative activity of commercial advertisements no national or local television channel has a comparable viewership. When U.S. and British channels combine, the rest have to only copy or base their information and news on the major channels. The recent experience is that one found the entire electronic media projected only one viewpoint and there was no second view. Thanks to the fast technological changes there is now a near monopoly of the few western media channels. It is a harsh reality. During the coalition invasion it was difficult to figure out the real position. The Arab channels were quoted only when suited. Will such a situation continue?

*Sixth*, what have been the real reasons for the action by U.S.–U.K. coalition? It is a widely recognised fact that Iraqi government, unlike most other oil producing countries, had never accepted the hegemony of the Western countries. With removal of the Saddam government the American and British combine would have a new equation in matters of access to oil resources. Besides the oil and long term perspective there is likely to be an immediate gain to certain powerful sections of the American and British economies. After occupation, the coalition forces have already announced that only their national corporations would be permitted to bid for new contracts for reconstruction of the Iraqi economy. All those who expressed dissent on their unilateral military action would not be allowed any share in the new economic activities. The economic advantage to the large transnational corporations of the coalition countries is only too obvious. The chain of economic advantages does not end here. Bush would get additional political support for the party and build the image of a hero in the American psyche.

*Seventh*, Saddam was never a popular personality in the Arab world. But after his removal and capture of Iraq by the coalition forces, Saddam has emerged some sort of an Arab hero. He is dead (probably) but he may live for generations to come. Viewed from the American perspective, the popular protests and worldwide demonstrations against their unilateral action clearly reflect the extent to which the nation's public image has taken a beating. The manner in which Iraq's accumulated wealth and oil potential would fall under control of non-Iraqi interests can fuel nationalist urges. Can one predict how long the occupation forces would be able to stay?

*Eighth*, already there is uneasiness in countries which did not support American-British coalition. France and Germany were made targets for having betrayed the earlier collaboration under North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). If President Bush and Tony Blair are heroes for having won the war, the French and German leadership can get projected as betrayers of common cause. India's position is neither here nor there. Indian Parliament disapproved of the military intervention only a few days prior to declaration of victory by the coalition forces. In the past few decades India was a close associate of Iraq and a good number of medical, engineering and other professionals worked in the country. Similarly, a good number of public and large private enterprises took up construction and supply contracts. The contribution of India in the construction of Iraqi railways is widely acclaimed. In view of decades-long Iraqi-India economic cooperation would the coalition-nominated government offer similar opportunities to India in the coming years? It certainly is an awkward situation. How would this get resolved? In this conflict Pakistan went all out to support the coalition forces. Will Pakistan step into India's shoes?

These are issues needing discussion. Would this have happened when Soviet Union was equally important? Or, will we have to live with all the consequences of a unipolar world?

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