

American interests in Oil and War

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The world is facing new challenges posed by both terrorist organizations and US led so-called ‘war against terrorism’. The contingency plan of the US Defense Department to launch nuclear strikes against seven countries — North Korea, Iran, Iraq, China, Libya, Syria and Russia has drawn the attention of the peace activists all over the world. Even states regarded as allies of the US in the ongoing war against terror have expressed their surprise at such display of arrogance by the US. The French Foreign Minister, Hubert Vedrine, and several other world leaders including the Russian Foreign Minister, Igor Ivanov, the German Foreign Minister, Mr. Joschka Fischer, and the European Union's External Affairs Commissioner of the European Union, the British Minister, Chris Patten, have all rejected the aggressive postures by the US.

They have even criticised the crude definition of states such as Iran, Iraq and North Korea as an ‘axis of evil’.

America’s Twin Interests: Oil and Military-Industrial Advantages

The politics of oil might be necessitating the recent declaration of the American will to go for war against seven countries. The Gulf is of utmost strategic importance for the US because the region caters to its energy-needs in significant measures. The geo-strategic importance of the region is even otherwise obvious. Throughout human history, the region has retained its geo-political significance. Situated at the junction of three continents- Asia, Africa and Europe- it provides linkage over land and across sea between Europe and Indian Sub-continent on the one side and Africa and India on the other. It offers the shortest and cheapest trade and transit route between the West and the East. It is also the birthplace of three great religions of the world namely, Judaism, Christianity and Islam. It has a vast reserve of oil, i.e., about 60 percent of the world’s proven reserves of oil. The question of control and exploitation of oil resources has always been a bone of contention between the western powers and the oil producing countries ever since the discovery of this resource during the early Twentieth Century.

The American interests in the region grew after the Second World War. It was because, the American energy requirements grew following to the huge industrial development that took place in this country and as the most important Power after the Wars it wanted to retain its supremacy by accelerating its economic development and expanding its military influence. One is reminded of the former American President, Eisenhower’s statement in 1959 that America had established “Military-Industrial Complexes”, as the basic pillars of the US economy. The Gulf as the provider of energy resource for its booming economy and military-industrial growth was bound to bring the US to this region. In fact, the influence of the European powers, which had sway over the region during the colonial period, declined as American interests grew. Many strategic thinkers have

pointed out that there was a clash of interests between the British and the Americans during the 1950s and this led to an undeclared Anglo-American diplomatic war.

However, USA, the dominant power prevailed and managed to establish its control in the region. The Americans cleverly backed all the feudal regimes in this region and turned them into loyal allies. After the ouster of the Shah of Iran, one of the most trusted allies of the US, the Americans were alarmed at the way popular resistance was building up against the incumbent regimes and through good use of diplomacy and overt or covert military alliances they have managed to keep rest of their friends out of danger. After the Gulf War of the 1991, the message to non-conformists has been loud and clear- the Americans are ready to go to any extent to preserve their power base in the region. They have also taken full advantage of the differences (Iran-Iraq, Iraq-Kuwait, Arab-non-Arab etc) and continue to establish their hold firmly in the region inspite of the huge wave of popular resentment against their armed presence in the area. The response of the Americans to September 11 has been symbolic accommodation of dissent asking American Women to abide by the norms of Islamic societies, reduction or withdrawal of troops presence in many states, increasing interest in Palestine issue etc. The American influence, however, continues to determine the politics of the region in future.

As far as the military prowess of the US is concerned, with the 'decline and fall' of the Soviet Union the US has emerged as the most powerful nation in the world. In the recent years the US has tried its best to match its military preponderance with its economic development, especially when countries like China, Japan and Germany or rather the European Union are posing serious challenges to its economic preponderance. There is a growing emphasis on arms sales in US. The Bush cry for National Missile Defense like Reagan's Start Wars, is yet another attempt to expand the American military network and develop its military industry further with the economic contribution from willing allies. The contribution to US economy through proceeds from arms-sales (in California alone more than 10,000 armed industries producing arms) has to be probed further to establish the links between the American interests in sustaining wars in different parts of the world and the growing militarisation of societies in the underdeveloped and developing corners of the world. American Defense Budget is about 328.9 billion US\$ in 2002, and it is likely to go up to 366 billion US\$ in 2003. America invests almost 40% on defence if one takes the entire investment worldwide on defence into account.

It is important to situate the ongoing war on terrorism in its proper context. The US pledge to eradicate terrorism and bring democracy, human rights and justice to the world sounds hollow when one weighs these against the overwhelming American interests. It is oil that keeps American interests alive in the Gulf. And for oil, the US needs to have trusted and dependent regimes in place. The issues of democracy, liberalism, representative governance, come far below in the hierarchy of interests. It is being learnt gradually that one of the main reasons for globalisation of Islamic fundamentalism has been suppression of dissent in Islamic societies in West Asia by incumbent regimes. These unrepresentative, feudalistic, dictatorial and authoritarian regimes have a vested interest in turning the tide of Islamic dissent brewing in their states towards outside. Osama would never leave Saudi Arabia if he would have been allowed to express his dissent at home. Similarly, most of the people nourishing a grudge against the US claim that but for the support of the US these regimes would not be there. The revolution in Iran and the politics in the aftermath suggest that the politics of popular representation is the best proof against

fundamentalism and it automatically brings in a sense of moderation that emphasises individual autonomy and social development along secular lines. Shutting out doors of popular expression is certain to encourage the conservative constituency, which ironically seeks to revamp the existing system through radical means. The real seeds of terror thus lie in the continuing American strategy of promoting injustice in the political domain. And it is common knowledge that the Afghan terror that Americans are trying to get rid of through their Daisy Cutters is of their own making.

As regards the Palestine issue that has been a fountain of Anti-US feeling in the region, perhaps, the US so far had a vested interest in keeping the Palestine issue going by raising Israel as a permanent whipping boy to divert attention from the real issues of unjust and undemocratic rules in the Gulf States and societies. The US attempt at bringing peace to middle-east is more conditioned by the perception that American inaction may complicate and worsen matters and affect its interests in the region badly. But in Israel they will soon find yet another unmanageable monster of their own making. It is too early to predict whether American diplomatic pressure alone will work on Israel. But the fact remains that the problem has reached such a pass because of active American support to Israeli belligerence over the years.

Against this backdrop, it is useful to reevaluate the discussions that are taking place worldwide on the theme of Islamic terror and the US sponsored war on terrorism. Ironically, the forces fighting terror could very well be the forces that raise it.