

Opinion

Getting back to Gandhi's Means: Three Years after 9/11

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Sheldon Wolin once said 'politics is continuous, cease-less and endless' while 'political' is episodic and rare'. A reformulation of this conjuration, keeping in mind the tendency of the 'episodic' to merge with the 'continuous', would reaffirm the absorptive ability of politics. This would perhaps explain the way international politics, while being spurred by the episodic, does not quite stray the groove. This is not to deny the change in texture, for the 'episodic' more often than not provides an opportunity to hasten prematurely the birth of an order that would otherwise take years to crystallize and assume definite shape.

The 9/11 was one such episodic occurrence, which has shot US to prominence as the only hegemonic power which can (and ought to?) police the available global political order. At the same time it has revealed the weaknesses of such power. The destructive imagination of the forces arraigned against the superlative might of the US far exceeded the apprehensive abilities of the sleuths that sought to protect such might.

The possibility of ramming an aircraft into a tower, everybody imagined will be too difficult to execute. But there it was and the American intelligence were left befuddled and so was the world outside. Even then one wonders if the people of America realized the eternal value of the age-old dictum "if you sow wind, you shall reap whirlwind" The US success against Communists in Afghanistan had, in fact, come full circle.

The conservatives (you could prefix them with neo, paleo, theo or whatever) in US and elsewhere were always there persuading the powerful to subvert the very values, they seek to promote, preserve and champion by brazen show of force, and advising the less powerful and the powerless to submit to its dictat. And submit they did. That is the way the history of the world is written even if they believe the meek shall inherit the earth.

In fact, the post-9/11 military operations in Afghanistan did not see much of the so-called civilized world reacting to the superior terror of the stealth bombers, the daisy cutters. The dramatic appeal of the principle of 'retributive justice' managed to weave an international consensus against the Taliban and Al Qaeda and the execution of the Operation Enduring Freedom saw the fall of the forces who actually shared the blame for the 9/11. Many analysts, both of the conservative and liberal shade, held that such an unrepentant display of might was in the best interests of the free world. The forces of terror can only be deterred by terror. 9/11 will

have to be counter-balanced by leveling of much of Afghanistan and, of course, by third-rate interrogation at 'Guantanamo Bay'. The free world has to leave some people unfree, not so much to measure its advance in the realm of values in comparison to them, but merely to preserve the ideological contrast, which will justify freedom and liberty. The Coopers, the Hansons, the Kristols, the Wolfowitzes, with all the persuasive ability at their command have convinced the 'other' world that it is in their interest to surrender to the benevolent imperialism that is spreading its wings, or else..

All possible nuclei of defiance needed to be isolated, quarantined and deleted. Immediately after the fall of the Taliban in Afghanistan, came the long awaited case of invasion of Iraq. Saddam was a monster, a confirmed violator of international trust, and the Satan reincarnate. Anybody opposed to US was. Hence Saddam would have to be toppled. "The terrorist threat to America and the world will be diminished the moment that Saddam Hussein is disarmed", so said Bush Jr. Otherwise Iraq might prove another hub of terrorism against the US. The Saddam-Al Qaeda links were to be forged, invented and linked up to Saddam's bluff regarding WMD. Once the case for attack was done up, the US forces marched into Baghdad like a knife through the cake. The liberated Iraq has so far been more problematic than Saddam, perhaps. The US toll has already crossed 1000 mark. It remains to be seen how many more deaths the Americans can take to just leave Iraq to Iraqis.

The forces of terror opposed to the US have come up with their tool of halal to hammer in the element of fear into poor journalists, labourers and aid-workers from outside (Nepalese, Egyptians and other co-religionists from the Islamic neighbourhood) who are there to rebuild Iraq. A look at the video clippings they post on the internet, and you know how much damage they have done to the very notion of 'Islam' The pre-Islamic tribal norms of the so called Jahilliya days, which Islam sought to modify and replace, seem to have overtaken the values like compassion, love and forgiveness that the Prophet advocated and preached. All around ourselves, it has been a wholesale defeat of the ethical and moral values that have defined the 'pilgrims' progress', the progress of human civilization as a whole.

After Afghanistan and Iraq, the eyes of the winners are set on Iran— the only country that is trying its best to experiment with Islamic democracy in its own way. So far at least 'electocracy, the game of numbers, has managed to take roots. Democratic values have started seeping into the body politic. Or else how would you explain the way the youngsters are taking to the liberal postulations of Khatami? Even if Iranian clergy calls the US a veritable Satan and swears day in and day out against the US administration, one should not confuse it as the voice of the average Iranians. One should not also brand the forces opposed to the clergy as dissidents in the western sense of the term and conclude that they are completely overshadowed by the conservative elements in Iran. A synthesis between two opposite ideological schools is taking place within the Iranian society. It is dangerous to look at Iran through the borrowed prism of Mossad.

9/11 in its own way signalled the loopholes in the grand American strategy of employing the Satan to defeat the Evil. The lesson of the history is there for all to see. It is too early to conclude that the free world's tactical alliance with the ideology of Jihad brought down the Soviet empire. The Soviet empire may well have crumbled in spite of it. As the free world is busy rebuilding Afghanistan in a way not too different from the way the Commies sought to build it once upon a

time, in the coffee rooms of the west, people are even joking that the poor Commies had brought the values that the western civilization all along championed to Afghanistan in their own way and it was a real blunder to raise the army of the bearded mullahs against such a system. The author has in fact come across such observations in the chat floors on the internet.

The insurgency of the type one has seen in Afghanistan and Iraq can not be tackled by stealth bombers, precision bombing or robust earth penetrators. It has to be tackled by a genuine confession that what US did to the Iraqis, in their overall obsessive zeal to topple a defiant monster called Saddam, was 'wrong'. The efforts to rebuild Iraq should proceed from such a genuine confession. Violence will breed violence and there is no end to it. An ethical consensus will have to be worked out ahead of efforts at healing the wounds. The US cannot afford to leave Iraq burning while preparing, almost out of paranoia, for yet another showdown with Iran and at the same time talk about graduate their efforts from Greater Middle East Initiative(GMEI) to Reform covering the Broader Middle East and North Africa (BMENA) After all, we are living in a closely interrelated world thanks to globalization (or Americanization?) and a blast anywhere (be it in Madrid, Jakarta, Beslan, Najaf or even Karachi) is a threat to peace everywhere.

It is necessary in the wake of the third anniversary of 9/11, a benchmark in international relations, to re-emphasise the relations between the means and the end. This is where Gandhi and all those philosophers he borrowed his ideas from, are so hugely relevant. You cannot reach a good end through a bad means or conversely there is an inglorious certitude about bad means driving you to a bad end. The *Jihad* of the Bin Ladens is after all an ideal construct, masquerading as an Islamic ideal; while in fact it represents the violent tribalism that Islam sought to replace through the message of love and compassion. Such an ideologised principle has to be countered through an equally potent ideology that draws its sustenance from the eternal values of peace and human freedom, advocated by Islam as well as all other religions world-wide. One is reminded of an incident from Ali's life here. One day Ali was discussing the virtues of Islam with a dissenter, who would not be convinced by anything Ali would say about Islam Towards the end of the discussion he lost his temper and spat at Ali's face and left the place in a huff. Ali's escort, who was a witness to the whole scene, unsheathed his sword and was about to kill the person when Ali caught hold of the sword by his hand and bleeding profusely admonished his follower, "What would you have achieved by killing him? Remember, we are fighting an idea and not the person". The more one seeks to tackle violence by violence, the more the violence spreads.