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The Americans have valid reasons for anger against President Saddam Hussein of Iraq, to whom President Bush has issued a 48-hour ultimatum to quit or face military action.

2. Not because he had clandestinely acquired weapons of mass destruction (WMD) for use against the US and Israel. Despite all their fabricated evidence, so diplomatically and so embarrassingly exposed by the UN inspectors for what it was, they have not been able to prove that he had. However, there is a strong possibility that the American Special Forces would plant in Iraq chemical and biological weapons from US stocks so that they could ostensibly recover them during the forthcoming military operations and tell the world they were right and the rest of the international community was wrong. The Americans could be unprincipled when it comes to ways of proving their point.

3. Not because he was hand in glove with bin Laden and his Al Qaeda. He was not Even a schoolboy in one of the lower forms would have told them of the hatred which bin Laden had always nourished against Saddam Hussein until last month when he came out in support of him for the sake of Islamic solidarity.

4. But because he funded the acts of suicide terrorism against Israel and failed to grieve over the deaths of thousands of Americans and others on 9/11. In their view, as in the view of Israel, a resumed march towards a political solution to the Palestine question would not be possible so long as his regime continued in power and so long as the Government of Iran continued with its support of the suicide bombers of the Hizbollah and the Hamas. They think that the war in Iraq would ultimately herald the beginning of peace in Palestine, send a strong message to Teheran to mend its ways and moderate the equally oppressive regimes in other parts of West Asia.

5. From their perspective, they are justified in wishing to see the end of his regime in Baghdad. To be fair to Bush, it has to be underlined, as it has not been by many analysts, that it was not he who initially thought of the change of regime as the objective of US policy in Iraq. Large sections of the American people and the Congress have been calling for it since the 1990s.

6. Many forget that it was the Congress which had called for the overthrow of the Saddam Hussein regime by enacting the Iraq Liberation Act, signed by the then President Bill Clinton on October 31, 1998, and allocating US \$ 97 million for this purpose.

7. Article 3 of this Act laid down the aim of American Iraqi policy as the overthrow of Saddam Hussein and US help in setting up a democratic regime in Baghdad. Article 4 called for US support to anti-Saddam Hussein opposition groups for this purpose in the form of training by US Army instructors, supply of arms and ammunition and propaganda material.

8. On January 16, 1999, seven Iraqi opposition groups - out of about 80 - were selected for US assistance ---the Iraqi National Accord (INA), the Iraqi National Congress (INC), the Islamic Movement of Kurdistan, the Movement for Constitutional Monarchy, the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP). Only the last three have roots in Iraq. The rest were unknown to the Iraqi people till the US embraced them and started projecting them, unconvincingly, to the world as the standard-bearers of democracy in Iraq.

9. On January 21, 1999, Mrs. Madeleine Albright, the then Secretary of State, designated Foreign Service Officer Francis Ricciardone as "Special Representative for Transition in Iraq" to co-ordinate the implementation of US policies to bring about a regime change.

10. The covert means initially adopted under the Clinton Administration failed to produce results because of US failure to come to terms with certain ground realities. The most important of these ground realities was that the Shias constituted the majority in Iraq, forming 51 per cent of the total population as against 46 per cent Sunnis. Introducing democracy in Iraq meant helping the Shias to come to power and rule the country. The Americans wanted to use the Shias as surrogates in their operations to have Saddam Hussein overthrown, but were not prepared to support their rule of the country lest it spread shivers across the spines of the pro-American rulers of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Bahrain.

11. It was an act of hypocrisy to proclaim the US policy objective as democracy in Iraq if one was not prepared to tolerate the majority community acquire the reins of power in its hands. Even though the present hotch-potch of anti-Saddam Hussein coalition backed by the US has Shia personalities in important positions, it is doubtful whether the US would let them emerge on the driving seat in Baghdad once Saddam Hussein either quits or is driven out.

12. What the US advocated and continues to advocate for Iraq is not democracy as perceived by the majority of the Iraqi people, but democracy as designed in the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) that would serve US national interests. If one were to argue from the US angle, what the situation called for was to examine why the covert operations failed to produce results and to introduce the necessary correctives. Continued covert operations would have had the advantage of promoting US policy objectives, though more slowly than overt invasion, without adding to the Islamic anger against the US in the world today.

13. The Islamic anger against the US is another ground reality, the implications of which have not been adequately analysed and understood by US policy-makers. It was this anger post-1991, which spawned the likes of bin Laden, Ramzi Yousef, Khalid Sheikh Mohammad and their ilk and led to their irrational acts of terrorism---initially against the USA and subsequently against anybody else whom they perceived as enemies of Islam.

14. The US has certainly made progress in the war against international jihadi terrorism. India, the most suffering victim of pan-Islamic jihadi terrorism in the world today, has reasons to be gratified over the US success in its operations. Even though these operations are designed to protect American lives and interests and not those of India, there is likely to be a beneficial fall-out for India too, but on a limited scale.

15. But, the way these operations have been carried out not only in Afghanistan and elsewhere, but also in the US itself has added to the Islamic anger against the US at a time when an equally important US policy objective should have been to reduce this anger. The increase in this anger has already led to a strengthening of the political influence of the Islamic fundamentalist and jihadi forces in Pakistan and could cause an anti-Hamid Karzai backlash in Afghanistan. India cannot hope to remain insulated for long from the impact of this anger on its own Muslim community, the second largest in the world after Indonesia's, which has so far treated bin Laden and his ilk with disdain.

16. If Saddam Hussein refuses to quit, the triumph of the inevitable US military action should not be in doubt. The question is not whether the US would win, but how soon. But it would be a Pyrrhic victory, which would not contribute to enhanced peace and security for the US, Israel and the rest of the international community.

17. The world has nearly a billion Muslims. No world leader can afford to be insensitive to their feelings of hurt and anger. Ultimately, whether the world is spared the consequences of their anger is not going to depend on the autocratic rulers of the Islamic world on whose support the US is counting for removing another autocratic ruler from power. It is going to depend on the perceptions and feelings of rage of the ordinary Muslims in the streets, mosques and madrasas.

18. They perceive the USA's war on Iraq not as a war to liberate the Iraqi people from an autocratic ruler and give them the fruits of democracy, but as a continuation of a war on Islam being waged by the "crusaders" and the Jewish people. The aggravation of their anger consequent upon the US military action would not bode well for peace and security.

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