

## **After the Afghanistan and Iraq Wars: Perspectives from the US**

### **Harry G. Barnes**

Former US Ambassador to India

Harry G. Barnes, former US Ambassador to India (1981-85) participated in a round table discussion organised by the Centre on 11 August 2003. Barnes was a career diplomat who held ambassadorial positions in Romania, Chile and India. He was also Director General of Foreign Service from 1977-81. After his retirement he has been active in human rights and foreign policy issues. Barnes, in his address at the round table discussion on “After the Afghanistan and Iraq Wars: Perspectives from the US”, gave a brief introduction about the growing security concerns in the American society and the impact of the 9/11 event on the forthcoming Presidential elections. Having put across the point that security concerns had gained ascendancy in American politics, he then proceeded to dissect the national security strategy document of 2002.

He highlighted two significant issues that stood out after the formulation of the new national security strategy.

- In the early months of the Bush Administration, there were reservations about how American relations with both Russia and China were to develop. However, by the time the national security policy statement was announced, those reservations were not to be seen, but rather discussions about the importance of a strategic relationship with both the nations.
- The second aspect which he considered as more dramatic was a series of references to the obligations that the US had to itself, to be prepared to take action unilaterally – by itself, if need be – if major American interests were threatened. The term pre-emption or prevention was used in the strategy document. He considered this as more than a simple reassertion of the “right of self-defence” in the UN Charter. He was of the opinion that the wars on Afghanistan and Iraq were manifestations of this strategy, even though the strategy was not in print at that time.

He then outlined the salient features of three different approaches to the national security strategy, viz., the dominance and preventive approach, deterrence-containment, and cooperative world order.

### **Dominance and Preventive Action**

- The US must be willing to use military force in anticipation of threats. If need be it must take unilateral action against such threats.
- To take unilateral action there is the need for military dominance. Hence, the US must maintain its conventional and nuclear military superiority over the others.
- Such, preventive military action alone is not enough. It is essential to extend the idea democracy and free market to establish peace in the long run.

- The approach would add an additional burden of \$100 billion to the Defense budget, which is already estimated to increase from the present \$400 billion to \$500 billion in the next five years.

### **Deterrence and Containment**

- The US has the right to act unilaterally. This approach includes a willingness to pre-empt threats with force if necessary. But, that shouldn't be the principal approach, rather it should be a tool of last resort.
- The US must work with like-minded countries on all aspects of a comprehensive strategy of robust containment and active deterrence.
- While the philosophy of free market and democracy is good, it must be acknowledged that all nations would not embrace them. Sometimes there are other criteria and obligations that are more important. Nations do not have permanent friends or enemies, but they do have permanent interests. For example, in the fight against terrorism, one may have to align with somebody who might otherwise have been described as a tyrant.
- This approach would not be a burden on the Defence budget, provided certain cost cutting measures were undertaken by rolling back certain programmes.

### **Cooperative World Order**

- The US must adopt a policy of multilateralism. Even with all the powers that it has now, the US cannot confront the broad array of existing security threats all by itself. It has to expand its cooperation with the allies and international institutions so that they too could share security responsibilities.
- The efficacy of preventive military action is overrated. It breeds resentment. Military dominance should not be an end to be pursued in itself.
- The best way to protect American interests is through a cooperative arrangement. Hence, international system must be strengthened. It helps in the growth of democracy and free market in the world.
- This approach would save some money in the Defence budget.

Barnes then made a few observations:

- The dominance and preventive action approach is a combination of two approaches – Wilsonian and Jacksonian approaches. Jacksonian, in the sense it does not bother about others. Wilsonian because it talks about the importance of democracy. However, Ambassador Barnes pointed out that this approach neglected the need for institutions, advocated by Wilson, to promote democracy.
- Unilateralism or preventive action, may sound easy, particularly when dealing with a major power. But, here again the US is finding that it is not always

quite so easy as it would appear in theory. Thus it is becoming clearer to people in the Administration that the US can't do everything, for example, in terms of rebuilding in Iraq, not to mention Afghanistan.

- Soft powers have the ability to persuade and to get support. The advantage of soft powers is that it usually leads to the sort of alliance which has stability and durability that the new type of so called coalition of the willing is not likely to have.
- It is becoming clear in other areas outside the military area, that great military powers cannot translate itself easily into solving other problems of global nature, such as, AIDS, infectious diseases, problems of environment, drugs, etc.
- Lastly, one of the fallouts and the consequences particularly in the last few weeks had been the questioning of the US government on the question of intelligence that was used and in some places allegedly misused.

In the light of the above discussion, Barnes analysed the nuclear negotiations with North Korea. Viewed from the perspective of the national security approaches, one might think that the US - those who applicate the overwhelming power approach - would say this was an area where it should ignore the reservations that North Korea's neighbours have and should go ahead and do something. But, instead, the US has been insisting on not dealing with North Korea alone and therefore promoting a multilateralist approach.

Barnes concluded his speech by expounding the views of Henry Kissinger. The "test for history for the United States will be whether we can turn our current predominant power into international consensus and our own principles into widely accepted international norms."

Responding to questions, Barnes said that the Americans were pragmatic in their approach and were not all that convinced about their righteousness. The Administration would not necessarily go as far along the path of righteousness as some of its partners would like them to do. Keeping in mind the 2004 elections it would be necessary for the Administration to satisfy both those who favour righteous actions and those who criticize that action. He was of the opinion that there would be a judicious mixture of all three approaches.

He also clarified that while divisions did exist in American society they were not of any consequence. According to him, if one had to look for divisions one might have to go back to the 60s when the Vietnam issue led to deep divisions. He said that there was such a prospect only if the present situation in Iraq and Afghanistan gets complicated or there would be a war that involved nuclear weapons.

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