

Democracy

# America's grand agenda for democracy

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**T**o promote peace and stability in the broader Middle East, the United States will continue working with our friends in the region to fight the common threat of terror, while we encourage a higher standard of freedom. The goal of two democratic states, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace is within reach and America will help them achieve that goal" — President George W. Bush, State of Union speech, February 3, 2005.

It was during his State of Union speech in January 2002 that the US President set the agenda of dealing with the threat of terrorism and weapons of mass destruction, and called Iran, Iraq and North Korea the "Axis of Evil". In his February 3, 2005 speech he concentrated on democracy, freedom and human rights — a sermon in setting America's grand agenda for democracy that is not unpredictable. His tone was not as aggressive as in 2002, but he categorically talked about four important things.

First, he appealed to Saudi Arabia and Egypt to democratise their regimes towards playing a leadership role in the Middle East and promoting democracy in the region. Second, he blamed Iran and Syria for sponsoring terrorism and subverting efforts for peace in the Middle East. Third, he welcomed the unleashing of a democratic process in Iraq through recent elections, and fourth he praised Pakistan and other countries for arresting and handing over Al-Qaeda suspects. Armed with a massive electoral mandate this time round, President Bush talked in detail about America's foreign and domestic policies and pledged to reduce budget deficit by fifty per cent by the year 2009.

American presidents deliver State of Union speeches by the beginning of every year to outline major features of the country's policies, domestic and foreign. American presidents have often used such an opportunity to spell out the goals and objectives that they intend to achieve during the current year. While major issues that impact the American election campaign are domestic in nature, in the recent past, US presidents have focused on foreign policy matters in this speech. President George W. Bush has particularly been consistent in talking about Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, Syria, North Korea, Israel and Palestine. In fact,

the Middle East and West Asia region has dominated Bush's speeches since he was first sworn in as US President in 2000.

The question is, how will Washington pursue the goals President Bush identified in this last speech, and how will the countries that have been threatened of dire consequences if they fail to abandon terrorism or implement 'democracy' and non-proliferation react to his assertions. In 2002, several countries severely criticised Bush's use of the term "Axis of Evil" for Iran, Iraq and North Korea. While American and allied forces occupy Iraq and the so-called democratic process in that country has begun, the situation in Iran and North Korea is unchanged. Washington blames both countries for pursuing nuclear weapons programmes and undermining the people's rights by denying democracy, but the United States has been unable to neutralise

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either regime, and President Bush's recent State of Union speech is merely a repetition of his previous assertions and rhetoric.

America's agenda of democracy lacks credibility for three important reasons. First, Washington's road map for introducing and strengthening democracy is full of contradictions. America talks about democracy and human rights, but looks the other way when regimes it supports either derail the democratic process or consolidate their hold over power with the help of the military. The primacy of its economic, political, strategic and security interests are such that Washington is unable to take a position against authoritarian regimes it supports. There are numerous such examples, from Morocco to Brunei. President Bush has talked about Israel and its democratic credentials, but he has glossed over the Jewish state's usurpation of the legitimate rights of millions of Palestinians and hundreds and thousands of Israeli-Arabs.

Contradictions in America's agenda for democracy are thus responsible for creating chaos, confusion and crisis in global order. Taking advantage of its uni-polar status since the end of the cold war in 1990, United States has managed to pursue the policies of 'unilateralism', 'regime change', 'collateral damage', and 'pre-emptive strike' under the garb of either supporting democracy or fighting terrorism. But in reality,

these policies only demonstrate America's 'soft' and 'hard' powers.

Second, from any standard, democracy cannot be planted or imposed but evolves as a result of a process. President Bush has pledged to support freedom and democracy in the Middle East, an assertion which lacks both capability and credibility. So far, the USA has spent around 250 billion dollars in Afghanistan and Iraq in the name of fighting terrorism, rebuilding and democratisation of the two countries. Has any one asked White House, Congress, State Department or Pentagon why Afghanistan and Iraq are still so dependent on American and allied forces for their survival and for how long the American forces will protect the regimes in power because of their fragile political standing?

The American taxpayers must hold the Bush administration accountable for the enormous material losses as well as human casualties in Afghanistan and Iraq that have yielded no substantive results. President Bush speech made it clear that he cannot give any deadline for the withdrawal of US forces from Iraq because terrorists may take advantage of such a pullout and strike back with vengeance. America's predicament from the Vietnam War to its invasion of Iraq is that it talks about democracy but lacks the political will to promote legitimate democratic forces, and supports forces that promote and patronise corruption, nepotism and authoritarian political culture under the garb of democracy in various developing countries. Third, America's agenda for democracy is contradicted by Washington's own inability or unwillingness to pursue political, rather than military options.

Now President Bush feels that Iran is not following a democratic path and has deprived its citizens of their legitimate political rights. This criticism flies in the face of America's support to various military and authoritarian regimes based on its interests. No doubt democracy is a proper mode of governance and people may be better off in a democratic set up but this doesn't mean that force should be used to impose a particular brand or system. As long as the United States uses its soft and hard power to ensure its preponderance in global affairs, the issues of democracy, human rights and nuclear non-proliferation will remain intractable and out of reach for ordinary people around the globe. At the same time, developing countries must realise that they need to put their own houses in order and provide their people the basic necessities of life — including basic human freedoms.

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