

America won't tolerate unfriendly democracies

Democracy 27-3-05 FRO

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Maybe some will run for office and say "vote for me, I look forward to blowing up America". In a half-joking manner, Bush hinted that he would respect the outcome of the elections even if such people were elected.

Next day, Bush said: "All Syrian military forces and intelligence personnel must withdraw from Lebanon before the Lebanese elections in order for the elections to be free and fair. They [the Lebanese people] have the right to choose their own parliament, free from intimidation." Since his re-election last November, Bush has made foreign policy a subject in which he had scant interest prior to September 11, 2001 his primary focus. This has led to embarrassing contradictions.

While Bush insisted on complete Syrian withdrawal as a precondition for the Lebanese elections to be fair and free, he, nonetheless, had insisted that the Iraqi elections be held on January 30, as they had been scheduled, despite the presence of American forces in that country.

As'ad Abdul Rahman

Although circumstances prevailing in Iraq then were not in any way conducive for such elections, the American administration insisted that they be held as planned despite numerous calls for postponement from various Iraqi parties. The interim Iraqi Prime Minister Eyad Allawi had constantly asserted that postponing the elections would be seen as a reward to the insurgents. The Association of Muslim Scholars and the Iraqi Islamic Party chose to boycott the elections because they believed, and rightly so, that they had been marginalised by the occupation authorities.

Despite the grim situation that surrounded the elections, they were over publicised and highly touted by the occupation authorities as indicators of Iraqi progress.

With the absence of Iraq's Sunnis and the high turnout among the Kurds and Shiites, the results of the elections came as no surprise to anyone.

The Independent Electoral Commission of Iraq announced that the Shiite-backed United Iraqi Alliance won a majority of votes but fell slightly short of an outright majority. With 130 seats in Iraq's 275-member Transitional National Assembly, the pro-Iran United Iraqi Alliance, which consists of the Dawa Islamic Party and the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution will be dominant.

Both parties are backed by Iran and their leaders found shelter in that country for years during Saddam Hussain's rule. The emergence of these two Shiite parties and the naming of Dr Ebrahim Al Jaafari as the leading candidate for Iraq's prime minister put the Bush administration in a tight position.

Bush constantly says that he is committed to democratising the region and encourages the emergence of friendly, secular and free market oriented governments. But this is not always the case, as the recent Iraqi elections have clearly shown. How would the Bush administration react if as can be expected the newly formed Iraqi government takes steps that might not necessarily be conducive to America's long-term interests?

Free and fair elections might bring to power elements that are hostile to US interests. In the 1990s, fair elections in Algeria brought to power an Islamic party whose line of thought closely resembled that of Osama Bin Laden. Instead of accepting the results as one would expect from an ardent proponent of democracy the United States tacitly urged the Algerian military to annul the results and crack down on the Islamists in the country.

Municipal elections in the Gaza Strip gave Hamas the upper hand. Hamas is now likely to make more political gains in next July's legislative

elections. And the group is by no means considered a friend of the United States. It has been on America's list of "terrorist organisations" for some time now. Chile is yet another case in point. Internationally monitored free elections had brought to power the Marxist government of Salvador Allende. This instantly sent shock waves in Washington. In 1973, covert operations by the CIA brought the government down and replaced it with General Augusto Pinochet's bloody tyranny the likes of which the world has rarely witnessed. Contemporary politics is awash with such examples, including Venezuela and Mohammad Mosaddeq's Iran. This is a clear travesty of reason and common sense.

Are such outcomes acceptable to the Bush administration? If free elections bring to power hostile elements how would the Bush administration react? In the past, the Cold War was used as a pretext to justify covert operations to unseat unfriendly, yet democratically elected, governments. It is very unlikely now, given the raging "war on terror", that the United States will condone any such electoral setbacks anywhere in the world.

If such an eventuality happens in the Middle East, the peoples of the region will explode in anger because, as one intellectual put it, "The only thing worse than living under a dictatorship is being promised a democracy and then not really getting it."

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