

Dangerously divided but democratic

By Dr. Akhtar Hasan Khan

NO nation is politically monophilosophic. Countries as old as England and France have many colours on their political spectrum. The US, which is a melting pot of immigrants from all over the world, has different political strands.

In almost all western democracies, political parties are either left of centre or right of centre. In the US, the Republicans have been right of centre and the Democrats left of centre. This was true until Bush Jr. came on the scene. Now the Republican party has gone to the far right, and in the process, has acquired strong religious overtones.

Separation of the church and the state is a pillar of the US constitution — a principle followed by all US presidents. Bob Woodward asked Bush Jr. (*Plan of Attack*) as to why he deviated from his father's policy by attacking Iraq. Bush Sr. had very wisely observed that he did not want the "US to be an occupying power in a bitterly hostile land." But Bush Jr. replied that he had guidance from a "higher authority" than his father to attack Iraq. Tony Blair joins him in prayer meetings where they get divine revelation on weapons of mass destruction in Iraq.

Dan Reagan stated at his father's funeral that although his father was deeply religious, he did not wear religion on his sleeve as President Bush Jr. and the neo-conservatives are doing.

President Bush has described his war on terror as a crusade, which literally means fighting for the cross of Christ. Theologians supporting

be left to the states as some states like California and Massachusetts have allowed gay marriages whereas states in the southern Bible belt have banned it. The scientific community is strongly in favour of stem cell research as it holds great promise for curing many debilitating diseases like Alzheimer and Parkinson's. President Bush is opposed to it on religious grounds.

For President Bush, public policy is not to be framed by an election approach but by religious righteousness, forgetting the lessons of religious warfare in Europe, which lasted for centuries and ended only when everyone learnt to tolerate each other's religion. More importantly, he fails to realize that in pursuit of scientific knowledge and personal liberties, religious dogmas have no place. He seems to be applying the opposite yard-

stick out legal redress was inconsistent with the basic principles of the US constitution and judicial system.

The Senate Intelligence Committee and the 9/11 Commission presented a unanimous bipartisan report and recommendations on very controversial issues in an election year. They stated in clear terms that Saddam Hussein was not involved directly or indirectly in events leading to the invasion and occupation of Iraq. They also stated that Iraq had no weapons of mass destruction as alleged by President Bush and Tony Blair. The intelligence on this subject was flawed and the Director of CIA, George Tenet, had to resign for tailoring his intelligence to the desires of hawks in the White House.

Both the Senate Intelligence Committee and the 9/11 Commission lamented the lack

of morality in US leadership. The 9/11 Commission states, "The US must offer an example of moral leadership in the world, committed to treat people humanely and abide by the rules of law." The statement clearly implies that this is not being done at present.

Evidently, by encouraging Sharon's atrocities in Palestine, Indian cruelties in Kashmir, Russian repression in Chechnya and acting after thousands had died in Bosnia and Kosovo, US might is detested around the world for its double standards. The casualty figures in Iraq give only the number of coalition soldiers dead and injured. The far greater numbers of Iraqis who have died are never mentioned.

The manner in which Michael Moore has lampooned Bush as a buffoon

The US today is split in the middle. All political commentators have observed that whereas in previous elections the swing vote was 30 per cent, in the presidential election 2004 it is only 10 per cent. Forty-five per cent of the electorate has decided to vote for Bush, come what may. An equal percentage is committed to Kerry. This is not because they love Kerry but because they hate Bush, his foreign policies, especially the invasion of Iraq.

the cross of Christ. Theologians supporting Bush like Rev. Jerry Falwell and Rev. Frank Graham have used blasphemous words for Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Rev. Graham says that Christianity and Islam are as different as light and darkness. Revs Falwell and Graham do not belong to the mainstream Catholic or Protestant churches but to a new proselytizing church which is deeply disturbed by the fact that Islam is the fastest growing religion in the world.

The religious and dogmatic approach also determines the far right Republican attitude on abortion, gay rights, stem cell research and other issues. The Republicans are opposed to abortion because they feel that abortion at any stage is killing the child and they proclaim themselves to be pro-life. They are also opposed to gay rights and Bush proposed an amendment to the US constitution to ban gay marriages. He knew well that the amendment had no chance of being approved by two-thirds of Congress but still went through the motion in order to placate the religious far right. The Senate did not consider the issue to be fit even for voting.

The liberals want this issue to

stick to freedom and tolerance.

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Despite this sharp division, the US is firmly committed to democracy. The US Supreme Court ruled that about 600 prisoners, of which more than a 100 are Pakistanis held at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba, have the right to appeal before the US courts and they cannot be held in detention without due process indefinitely.

The counsel for the state argued that the detention centre is outside the jurisdiction of the US Supreme Court but the learned judges in a 7-2 decision held that it was in their jurisdiction and holding prisoners with-

pooned Bush as a buffoon in his documentary

Fahrenheit 9/11 could only happen in the US. Moore catches him in awkward moments, especially sitting unmoved with a blank expression for seven minutes on hearing that the World Trade Centre and Pentagon had been hit by civilian aircrafts.

He expatiates on connections between Osama bin Laden and Bush families and how members of the Osama family were allowed to leave the US in a chartered plane without being questioned at a time when civilian flights were disallowed. He shows how happy Iraqis were before being pushed into the miseries of war. He depicts the suffering of an American mother who has lost her son in Iraq. In short, the film paints Bush as a foolish leader without any feeling for the ordinary man.

The US electorate must prove its deep commitment to democracy by voting out Bush from the White House. Otherwise the "higher authority" may guide him to commit more horrible acts than the invasion of Iraq. Another term for Bush would be dangerous for the US and the entire world.

The writer is a former federal secretary.