

THE MAKING OF US FOREIGN POLICY FORMATIVE INFLUENCES, SYSTEMIC ISSUES AND THE PROCESS

Touqir Hussain*

Abstract

Every foreign policy is moved by the same guiding principles of national interests and cold blooded power politics and America is no exception. The process of foreign policy making in USA is hard to understand even for those who live in the US but especially for those abroad particularly if they have not been exposed to the American history, culture and political system. This paper is an attempt to help one understand U.S foreign policy at least. First of all it is the foreign policy of a highly open and vocal society with a powerful media and advanced civil society that keep the government under constant watch and scrutiny. Secondly it is the foreign policy of a highly complex and in many ways unique democracy under constant stress of domestic politics. There is an issue and there is a politics of an issue. So beware what is it that one is watching—policy or politics? Interestingly the US has five foreign policies. The President's foreign policy, when he takes office has a certain idea in his mind of what his foreign policy should be the foreign policy of Congress, another by the media and the third as seen and understood by the public opinion especially by the vast majority of the electorate. None of the four foreign policies is monolithic and is split on most issues among diverse shades of opinion. The intersection of these four foreign policy mindsets or versions is the fifth foreign policy, indeed what we call THE US FOREIGN POLICY, produced by the mechanics of many different pulls and pushes--principally the hydraulics of political process and strategic thinking.

Key words: *foreign policy, process, open society media, congress*

The American foreign policy is moved by the same guiding principles of national interests and cold blooded power politics as practiced by other big powers. Yet it is so hard to understand as it is vastly different in process, form and substance as well as in rhetoric. It is hard to understand even for those who live in the US but especially for those abroad particularly if they have not been exposed to the American history, culture, political system, social values, its religious origins, capitalist mindset and a strong sense of individualism --factors that all

make America a unique nation.¹ Not just the foreign policy-- everything that America does is different or it does in a different way or in a way that looks different.

Here is honest attempt to help one understand its foreign policy at least. First of all it is the foreign policy of a highly open and vocal society with a powerful media and advanced civil society that keep the government under constant watch and scrutiny. Secondly it is the foreign policy of a highly complex and in many ways unique democracy under constant stress of domestic politics.

That means the government has to be explaining its policies all the time. Expressing the policies without necessarily articulating them, and revealing them but not more than what is necessary. And that also means the leadership ends up saying different things to different audiences specially while engaged in the process of making of public policy. So whatever the target audience there is always a certain gap between the rhetoric and reality. It is a tough balancing act, is not always done successfully and often causes confusion about the policy or at least about the intention behind it, especially among the audiences abroad. In other words issues do not live only at the level of foreign policy. There is an issue and there is a politics of an issue. So beware what is it that one is watching—policy or politics?

The U.S has five foreign policies. The President when he takes office has a certain idea in his mind of what his foreign policy should be. But to realize his vision he has to navigate through three other foreign policies --one by the Congress, another by the media and the third as seen and understood by the public opinion specially by the vast majority of the electorate. None of the three foreign policies is monolithic and is split on most issues among diverse shades of opinion, world view and interests. The intersection of these three policies, each of which often remains inchoate, specially on issues of high public interest, with the President's own inner thoughts or vision produces what is known as public policy. This is the fifth foreign policy, indeed what we call *THE US FOREIGN POLICY*, produced by the mechanics of many different pulls and pushes--principally the hydraulics of political process and strategic thinking.

Some of these political pressures are not just coming from the Congress, the media and public opinion but also from various lobbies and special interests who speak through them as well as directly. And then there is another factor, the systemic issues--pressures and influences being exerted from within the Executive branch-- from the Pentagon, the

* Ambassador Touqir Hussain, Adjunct Professor at Asian Studies Programme Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service, Georgetown University, USA.

¹ For an interesting account see Allan Nevins and Henry Steele Commager's classic work , *A Pocket History of the United States*(New York: Pocket Books, 1998), v-vii.

CIA, the intelligence community, the State Department and other bureaucratic institutions. That is where the phenomenon of leaks comes in. Leaks are essentially a way of sabotaging or advancing a certain policy option while issues are being debated either as part of settling turf wars in the bureaucratic power play or for personal or ideological reasons.

The President has to contend with various ideological shades of foreign policy in the country ranging from isolationism, conservatism, and neo conservatism to liberalism and ultra-liberalism which all have found allies among the various strands of foreign policy and centers of power described above: And also resolve the constant tussle between the electoral calendar on one hand and strategic imperatives on the other, between America's own interests that are global, and those of its allies that are local and regional.

And that is not all that plays on the formulation of US foreign policy. There is the foreign policy establishment outside the government like the academia and the think tanks which also have the pretensions of speaking for and to the US foreign policy. This phenomenon further complicates the understanding of the policy specially by the outsiders. There are hundreds of respectable think-tanks, foundations, and institutions in the United States engaged in research to advance knowledge and understanding on a wide range of issues of public interest. Some are doing good honest academic research while others have ideological bias and partisan affiliation and sometimes end up acting as adjuncts or sympathizers to special interests including the government agencies. To varying degrees most of them act as advocacy groups wanting to influence policy. But in the popular belief their imprint on public policy has been vastly exaggerated. If anything, they are under the reverse influence of their patrons, including the administration who uses them sometimes for enlisting or creating public opinion. But most of the time these institutions are trying to have an impact on public policy on their own as well as on behalf of the constituencies—liberal or conservative-- that fund them. This is America, good or whatever.

Then there is another aspect of the American life influencing the public policy--mobility. The way the system works, the academics, experts and professionals are flitting back and forth between the government service and private sector. This is the so-called mobility of the American way rooted in high ideals of capitalism, democracy, and individual freedom. It enhances an individual's expertise and experience. And also keeps the government close to public opinion and preferences. Besides fulfilling one of the core ideals of American democracy that the government should be from among the people it brings fresh ideas to policy.

But its downside is that with the experts going back and forth the policy often lacks continuity. Secondly, there is a human element that

affects the policy as these experts are sometimes susceptible to looking after personal interests such as career, money and fame--the hallmarks of a society resting on strong foundations of individualism and the idea of progress. And as some of them end up playing multiple roles of academics, policy practitioners, consultants, advisors or future lobbyists it naturally gives them a certain policy bias and affects the quality of their analysis.

So one can well imagine the multiple and complex factors at play in the making of the US foreign policy. It should be noticed that the ordinary issues are not being discussed here on which the President has a lot of authority and leeway. The point of argument is the major challenges that are of high public concern and vital to national interests specially wars or serious threats to the security of the US or its citizens or serious economic issues specially that affect the jobs market, or issues that have entered the body politic of America like the support for Israel. They all excite the Congress and the media and energize the whole spectrum of the American system. In other words issues which are weighty and potentially intersect with domestic politics and affect elections. US Pakistan relationship of the past decade is one such issue.

Form and Substance of the US Foreign Policy

So far the process has been discussed. Let's now turn to the form and the substance. For that the first thing you have to bear in mind is that at issue is the foreign policy of a nation that has been for major part of its history isolationist proudly self-conscious of its values and unique historical experience known as the sense of "exceptionalism". And when it did start relating to the world beyond its shores it was already a major power having the pretensions and the potential to be a super power. That means never in its history has the US related to other countries as an equal. It related from an overwhelming military and economic strength and always felt certain superiority either of national power or of moral purposes.

These are the basic facts about the formative influences on US foreign policy. But how these have shaped the American policy and behavior? Americans' historical experience and rich and self-contained existence that makes them dependent on no other power, has made them self-centered, sometimes arrogant, and often overbearing and thus unable to cross cultural barriers and understand the substance of other societies. These feelings of superiority and a sacrosanct self-image of an indispensable, exceptional and savior nation especially since the victory in the Second World War and subsequent rise as the greatest economic and military power, have led to two sets of beliefs. *First*, a feeling that they do not need to understand other societies—especially those considered inferior or at a lower level of achievement who cannot give anything to America in terms of ideas, specially its idea of progress, material progress that is-- and institutions. *Second*, that since America is

doing so much public good, its interests, world view, and strategies should be beyond challenge. As an exceptional nation it demanded an exceptional treatment.

Both these complexes have led to a tendency on the part of the United States to define its own strategic interests in value terms--minimizing or ignoring the cold blooded power politics that is always there--but considering the interests of others only as power politics, and sometimes as immoral and evil. America prefers to relate to other nations as a leader but its concept of leadership has been to lead by hegemony or domination not by consensus or consultation. And taking pride on being a nation of laws it has also sometimes claimed to be right on legal grounds.² And *lastly* its capitalist mindset has often encouraged it to throw money at problems and try to buy friendships especially of unrepresentative or authoritarian leaderships of smaller and dependent countries. Washington treats these countries as if they have no national interests of their own, and if they have these should be subsumed in the US interests. If the American interests are not being served by them there is feeling of surprise as to why these countries do not do Washington's bidding especially as they are being paid for it. There is also a feeling sometimes as if they are mercenaries. All this has made the US foreign policy a strange mix of self-righteousness, legalism, mercantilism and dictation.

America does not generally like to negotiate as this means admission of being equal or inferior to the others. From this perspective diplomacy is sometimes perceived as surrender. There is also a cultural and moral issue here. The feeling is that "bad behavior" should not be rewarded; also negotiating with "evil" makes it look defensible in the eyes of average American.³ When America does negotiate the style is so different from the traditional diplomacy. It often demands the ends of diplomacy as a pre-condition to talks.

The Americans also don't usually introspect or admit mistakes as this is seen as a sign of weakness. They have so much strength to bounce back from a crisis—their crises are usually of their own making (other nations' capacity to harm them being much less than their own) -- that they recover from it very quickly often having not suffered much relative to their strength. And even when they have suffered they have an enormous residual strength and absorptive capacity. So there is a paradox here. As the damage has not been great and it has been repaired so fast, there is no realization that they made a mistake.

² Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy* (New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 1995), 25-29.

³ Jessica Stern , *Terror in the Name of God: why Religious Militants Kill* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2004), Xvii.

The feeling is not to get tied down by any failure or live in the past, but get up, dust off and move on. Essentially this reflects a mindset of confidence in the future and in human capacity to rebound and progress. These are all positive attributes but Americans do not realize that only they can do it, given their strengths, unique historical experience and unbounded resources. They should not expect other societies to have the same strengths, outlook on life or world view. But they do, and sometimes try to mould other societies to their image, and no wonder they often fail specially in dealing with non-Western societies suffering from issues and challenges that American never faced. America's home grown solutions designed to address their own unique challenges and backed up by their unique strengths of human and natural resources and institutions are often irrelevant to the situation of these societies. But it is difficult for Americans to understand this.

The bottom line; Because of their overweening pride in their uniqueness, military and economic power, advanced democracy and political institutions, power of innovation, and a strong sense of liberty and individualism, Americans have come to believe that their system, their values and their way of thinking are not only the best but the only good way of doing things. The only terms of reference they can see the outside world from are their own. And they feel morally justified in trying to convert others to their point of view. In fact they feel their way is so good it does not even need explaining: They just tell people to follow it and when they do not or can't Americans cannot understand why.⁴ That is another reason why they prefer not to negotiate but to dictate, and are frustrated and baffled why a perfectly fine solution is not being obvious to others and accepted by them. Former German chancellor Helmut Schmidt is quoted to have once said "The problem is that you Americans think every problem has a solution."⁵ This perception at least at the public level often leads them to treat war as a mission to spread the American way rather than a conflict of nations, their interests, and world views.

If a state is going to war involving especially involving fragile or fractured societies facing identity and religious issues, poor governance, power imbalances, security threats and state and nation building challenges it needs to understand their internal dynamics which unfortunately is not a strong point of America. Washington relies instead on the use of military power backed up by economic aid to order change (for instance Afghanistan and Iraq in modern times and Vietnam in the past). Not only that, the approach is mechanistic, self-centered, and impatient. And inevitably it runs into two problems. It ends up playing to

⁴ Ibid. Henry Kissinger, 125-130.

⁵ David Ignatius, "America the War-weary and War-wary", *Washington Post* (Washington) April 5, 2013.

the weaknesses of these societies and their leaderships. And because of the heavy overlay of military and financial resources it faces constant scrutiny by media and politics at home causing flip flop of policy as the policy makers keep changing strategies but piling the new strategy over the old ones in order not to alienate any political constituency or pressure group. It causes a grid lock in the ground situation often leading to the failure of the American intervention even with the best of intentions.

But the interesting thing is failures are mostly not economic or military but of judgment or policy. Even when they eventually succeed the success often comes at an enormous cost and always leaves behind a trail of anti-Americanism and unresolved issues—the collateral strategic damage if one may call it.

A Foreign Policy Ideological in Rhetoric but Real-Politic in Substance

All this raises problems of both form and substance and amply demonstrates the US foreign policy to be a veritable enigma that ends up baffling even the Americans. With the globalization, the rise of rival powers, 9/11 and the wars that have followed American public is now concerned about many issues and that is affecting the making as well as conduct of the foreign policy as explained in the beginning. But in the past it did not really matter much.

The average self-contented American historically did not even know what was going on. He left the foreign policy generally to the President unless it was an issue of war and peace. On other lesser issues, for him or her, America was engaged in a moral commitment to the world, slaying monsters abroad and defending freedom. It brought prosperity to the Americans, and to the world, and defended the American way, they thought. And to some extent it was true. Hardly anybody cared as to how other countries thought of America. It was the American might and moral purpose at work, it was assumed. All that mattered was winning.

Cognizant of this American mindset, successive leaders historically made sure that all foreign policy engagements abroad were billed as a mission of higher purposes because that was the only way of mobilizing domestic support in an isolationist country for big and controversial foreign policy initiatives. This put a gloss over America's pursuit of power politics not only for the domestic but for foreign audiences as well. That is why the containment of Soviet Union in the Cold war was on behalf of the so called "free world" (that interestingly comprised among others Shah of Iran, Marcos of Philippines, Mubarak of Egypt, Mobuto of Zaire, and the military juntas of yester years in Latin America). And wars in Iraq and Afghanistan were on behalf of

“democracy”.⁶ And since in modern era the medium of TV has become so powerful that President Bush not only managed to convince the American public but also much of the outside world as well that his wars were for democracy promotion.⁷

Basically on issues other than wars, which, as said above are a special case, what Washington has really been doing and continues to do so is looking after its interests like other powers but a lot more aggressively and presumptuously. And it does so in a self-centered way and sometimes hypocritically and wants a total support from its allies specially small ones from whom it wants not just 100% but 200% support while its own support remains discretionary, limited and often subject to so many caveats. Americans can come and go as they please. They feel the allies have been paid for their services and America does not need to hang around. It should move on. It has other challenges to fight. But they don't want the world to judge them unkindly; they want others to have a positive image about them.

And interesting thing is being overly conscious of the superiority of their own system and way of doing things Americans are rarely aware of any double standards, contradictions or hypocrisy on their part. The Chinese for example are baffled that the US lectures them about not having relations with Sudan which are important to them for energy resources but for the same considerations the US does not mind having relations with Saudi Arabia.⁸ They tell Russia not to support Assad of Syria for reasons of democracy but the real reason according to Moscow is geo-strategic not democracy. And that under the pretext of democracy promotion Washington wants Russia to support American strategic interests at their own expense⁹ and the same (notion) thing is about Iran. Washington wants both China and Russia to see Iran through America's eyes but their position seems to be “well Iran may be a threat to you but not to us”. Both China and Russia have important economic and geo political interests there some focusing on Iran and some on the Middle East. Not to mention they see Iran as an important player in Afghanistan.

But to be fair to America the fact remains that for much of the 20th century beginning with the First World War the US commanding an

⁶ For further details how the Bush administration marketed the Iraq war to enlist domestic support see Frank Rich, *The Greatest Story ever Sold: The decline and Fall of Truth from 9/11 to Katrina*, (New York: Penguin Press, 2006), 206-215.

⁷ Conversation with a visiting fellow from China at SAIS Johns Hopkins University, June 14, 2011.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Vitaly Churkin (Russian Ambassador to the UN), interview by Charlie Rose, *Charlie Rose show*, on the American TV network PBS, February 2013, accessed June 4, 2013. <http://www.charlierose.com>.

immense array of diplomatic, economic, and political assets and military power has played a decisive role in international affairs maintaining some semblance of balance of power, stability and international order--economic, financial and political. There is no denying the US performs best when the challenge is entirely military (like winning the two World Wars) or purely economic and financial (like setting up international financial institutions and creating some semblance of a badly needed international order after the Second World War).s It also does well in the containment of big military and economic powers like it did with Soviet Union and later Russia or China. Lastly it has performed remarkably well in purely humanitarian challenges. Look at its admirable international efforts whether in Tsunami or Haiti or in Pakistan's earthquake in 2005 and then floods in 2010. In many ways it has been a force for the good. All said and done there have been great success stories in the US foreign policy.

The US and the Islamic World

Much of the contemporary trouble that the US has in its foreign policy exists mainly in America's policies towards its allies from the Cold War days in what was known as the Third World. Many such countries have now moved on and are finding new terms of engagement with Washington. They have done that successfully in Latin America which had borne the brunt of American domination and intervention for more than a century and a half; but not anymore. They have emerged out of it and their relations with the US are mostly normal. But one area of the world remains at odds with the US.

Serious issues still linger on in relations between Washington and Islamic countries or more appropriately Greater Middle East especially where many regimes, whether unrepresentative or elected are unpopular or pursuing unpopular policies on behalf of Washington on whom they have been dependent or codependent. And where to the two issues that used to loom large traditionally —energy and Israel—have now been added resurgence of political Islam and terrorism and concerns about Iran's nuclear program.

The US has been treating friendly regimes there as subordinates in a deal, whose friendship and cooperation could be bought to America's advantage. On Washington's behalf they have been pursuing unpopular policies and making themselves and by extension America unpopular. But the increasingly politically conscious populations have come to reject this bad bargain particularly in countries like Pakistan that are caught up in America's post 9/11 wars.

Washington does not understand these countries and they do not understand Washington. There is a history of anti-Americanism there that has been exacerbated by the Post 9/11 US policies.

US Pakistan Relations

Pakistan has borne the brunt of the negative fall out of the two wars—the war on terrorism and the Afghanistan war. And the fact is that a relationship that derives from war is not easy to handle especially if the war as in case of the Afghanistan war has not gone well. It becomes a minefield literally. Not to mention other issues hanging over the US Pakistan relations, namely the US relationship with India which incidentally brings in the resurgent China into the equation and the lengthening strategic shadow of Russia; and of course the Central Asia and its energy resources and the conundrum of Iran. What complexity?

Pakistan looks at America through its own prism of pain while Washington looks at it through its own lens of fear and anxiety evoked by issues of high public interest in this post 9/11 world, issues that agitate the media and the Congress. Pakistan has partly brought it upon itself by its own policies but the Americans focus only on Pakistan's contribution whereas Pakistanis put the entire blame on Washington. So there is a denial on both sides that affects the relationship. And they end up with a distorted view of each other. No surprise that the two sides have focused far too much on the negatives in the relationship.

The US policy towards countries like Pakistan and other allies on hire or seasonal allies lacks balance and tends to move in extremes or in bad compromises that serve neither its interests nor of its allies well. The US has treated Pakistan as partner in a deal. If they do not cooperate, the feeling in Washington especially in the Congress and the media is that let us cut off aid because after all the relationship is a deal. And a deal is a deal in the capitalist system. That is "fairness".

When a power/state treats other countries as hirelings she cannot build a long term or stable relationship. The other side also starts exploiting it. Pakistan is a perfect example where government has come under conflicting pressures, by America to do more and by the population to do less, and has ended up pleasing neither. As issues involved are serious they agitate the public at large promoting negative image of each other exacerbating tensions in the relationship.

That is why if the US Pakistan relationship is to go beyond the transactional stage it has to do two things. First even make the transactional relationship work.¹⁰ And build some trust by recognizing that neither side can have 100% of its interests served because some of these interests can be served by the other side only at the sacrifice of its own interests. Only when a certain degree of stability comes in that the relationship can move on to the strategic stage.

¹⁰ Remarks by Cameron Munter (Former Ambassador to Pakistan) *Atlantic Council South Asia Center*, moderated by Mr. Shuja Nawaz (Washington), February 13, 2013. Available at <http://www.acus.org/event/us-pakistan-relations-lessons-past-looking-future>.

In this author believes that both sides need to grow up. Currently the attitude and posture of both erode public support for the US Pakistan relationship in each country. Pakistan must understand that the US has certain interests like relationship with India which has its own dynamics, nonproliferation, fight against transnational terrorists on which it cannot go against its own interests just to please Pakistan and keep it on her side. And this will probably continue to include the use of drones whether Pakistan likes it or not. And Pakistan also has to do something about the anti-Americanism. Pakistan should not try to mask its internal weaknesses and fight its internal power struggles especially civil military rivalry through anti-Americanism.

The same goes for the US attitude --it has to recognize that Pakistan has interests of own on which it cannot have a major compromise just for the sake of American aid. And the worst is when Pakistan does not fall in line the entire machinery of American establishment, media, foreign policy establishment goes after Pakistan as if is enemy no one. Look at all the campaign last year on the Haqqani Network, and accusations of harboring Osama though knowing full well Pakistan did not know where Osama was. And even making abusive statement at high levels of the government that Pakistan army was either complicit or incompetent. Yes the administration was looking for a scapegoat for the problems in Afghanistan and wanted to get maximum political mileage from the killing of Osama but to do so at the expense of your ally is not just fair. It is not a good foreign policy.

Does it mean there is no way to deal with the American power or normal relations with the US? No. Countries that have mature policies resting on political stability, confidence, self-respect, and healthy nationalism in Latin America or elsewhere know how to deal with America. Look at India, Turkey, Brazil, China, Europe and Japan. They have the internal strength to counter the US power, withstand its pressure, and maintain a mutually beneficial relation with Washington. Even Pakistan of late 50's and 60's handled Washington much better while it also gained a lot from the relationship.

American power generally tramples over countries that allow them to be trampled. If one looks at the history of US Pakistan relations dispassionately the US has not got anything more than what Pakistan itself gave or was willing to give. So Pakistan cannot blame the US alone for all of Pakistan's problems.

Bush and the US foreign Policy

President George W Bush foreign policy was both a continuation and rejection of the old way of making the foreign policy. He virtually became an "imperialist" President especially during his first term exercising an unrestrained freedom of scope and decision making in the formulation of his foreign policy. And that is how many things went wrong. It is pertinent to deal with the subject at some length as this was more of an

aberration than norm. The idea is the readers should get a more balanced view of American policies that led to so much resentment against the US particularly in the Islamic world some based on genuine concerns, some on misperceptions, and others purely on conspiracy theories.

Let me begin by setting one misperception right. Had America become imperialist? And was American foreign policy being run by neo-cons during the Bush Presidency? My answer is in the negative on both counts. Yes, there were certain similarities in the historical phenomenon of imperialism and the combative and expansionist mood of America during the Bush administration, but what was different was equally important. The imperialist powers of the past dominated a cluster of weak, economically inferior, technologically backward, internally divided and half-sovereign territories which could be easily imposed upon. There was very little resistance to the imposed rule. The conflicts that dominated international relations were between rival imperialist powers. The world has come a long way since then.

One has to truly comprehend three things that led to the Bush foreign policy—one, the enormous fear and anger felt in the US in the wake of 9/11 tragedy, two, the unprecedented wave of anti-Americanism that had been sweeping across the Muslim world even pre-dating the terrorist attacks, and last, the stealthy manner in which the most powerful nation was attacked and humiliated and hailed by sections of the Muslim societies specially in the Middle East. All this sent an indelible message to the Americans that they were unsafe and vulnerable as there was a new enemy out there, faceless and willing to die, and armed with deadly new weapons that were easy to find and hard to fight. And it enjoyed sympathy among some elements of the Islamic world. So something serious had to be done. One of the first responses was—the Afghanistan war.

But I do not think Afghanistan war was conceived as an imperialist venture. A Taliban-weary Afghanistan, long caught up in a bloody civil war and hosting the biggest nest of global terrorism - a threat not just to the US but also to Pakistan and indeed the world - had been inviting international concern for some time. It was an intervention waiting to happen. It came ineffectually during the Clinton years and was thus already in train when the breaking point was reached with the attack on the World Trade Centre. It was a provocation the world could have ignored only at its peril.¹¹

Bush administration intervened but rather mindlessly and then created all kinds of problems for America and for Pakistan. What really happened was that a super power tempted by the opportunity of the post-cold war monopoly of power had been limbering up for some time

¹¹ Touqir Hussain, "Imperial America: A Skeptic's View" *Daily Times* (Islamabad), January 10, 2004.

to use force more freely to guarantee unchallenged assertion of its will on what is being seen as a menacing and disorderly new world. But scarred by the 9/11 trauma, inspired by a religious outlook and driven by the supreme consciousness of power, the American response ended up simplifying or distorting the emerging challenges.

In essence the American response through Afghanistan and Iraq wars reflected both the new and old thinking—the post-Cold War sole super power syndrome, and the traditional militarized mind set, and inability to understand the complex internal dynamics of many of the so called Third World countries struggling with various state and national building challenges some of which had been complicated by their involvement in the Cold War as an ally of one or the other super power.

It was not neo cons who wanted this. The entire administration was behind it as was the Congress, the media and the public. Bush administration was not just made up of neo cons—it was a matrix of multiple political strands - ideologues, evangelists, special interests, the hold-overs from the Reagan, Bush-I era with strong and long standing ties to big business, specially oil, and career lobbyists for Israel. Their interests may have diverged but the approach was similar. They all believed in the uncompromising use of unchallenged and unrivalled American power in pursuit of maximum national interests, to be defined as much by their own agendas as by any objective conditions.

The US made many misjudgments.¹² It thought all it needed in both countries was a quick military victory (against the Taliban and Saddam) and the entire nation in each case would be utterly compliant to their dominance that the US would go about establishing a “new order” without any resistance. In fact people would be happy having been “liberated”. But things did not go like that, because the challenges there were not military. Bush tried to use the old world tactic to deal with a new world and it blew up in his face.

Did America have other plans in both these countries beyond liberation? Probably but one may never know—not till years from now when documents will have become available or events will have moved sufficiently away from the post 9/11 emotions and the fog of wars that followed. This is not the time for truth to come out. The problem is even if Washington did have some other plans like getting a foothold in Central Asia and setting up an additional base in Iraq alternative or additional to Saudi Arabia one would not know from the ground situation as things did not go as planned. And when things do not go as planned in war parties

¹² Touqir Hussain, “Pakistan: A New Beginning?” *America’s Challenges in the Greater Middle East : The Obama Administration’s Policies. Pakistan: A new beginning?*, ed. Sharam Akbarzadeh (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011). 177-194.

always change the war narrative as well as the strategy and this comes to obscure the original purposes that remain unknown for a long time.

But world knows for now that both the wars had a serious fall out. In the case of Afghanistan war it was Pakistan which suffered the brunt of a troubled war whose spill over caused horrendous problems. In author's view these were unintended consequences. But many in Pakistan saw them as planned by the US to destabilize Pakistan especially as evident from a general impression that Washington did not seem to care. Not only that Pakistanis saw much anti-Pakistan noise coming out of Washington, some of it focusing on the concern about the safety of Pakistan's nuclear assets. They also saw a rise in the US India relations and India's growing influence in Afghanistan. Their conclusion that US and India were colluding to undo Pakistan was obvious but patently wrong. The intention may have been to put pressure on Pakistan but not to take it to the brink. This was not in America's interest and this is not what it wanted.

Perhaps for America's own good and for the good of the world the militarized policies of President Bush did not succeed. Otherwise American power would have been unstoppable and unrestrained. Washington has hopefully learnt some lesson now as reflected in the emerging thinking under Obama where America might be re-learning the limits of power (it learnt briefly after the Vietnam but quickly forgot) and the dangers of militarization of US foreign policy.¹³ But world will see: Both America and the world have changed.

Global Changes and the Changing America—Heart of the Dilemma

Here are three things that are happening. *First*, the fact that although the United States may have become the sole superpower, the globalization and the end of the Cold War have also led to a certain devolution of power, thus raising the status of other powers with competing interests and policies.¹⁴ This had made it difficult for the US to lead, tempting her to dominate and so provoking reaction and resistance. There was a tragic paradox in America's condition; being the only superpower encourages the temptation to use power yet constrains the prospects of success as never before. American power, therefore, has not been absolute. And, on many issues, the United States has been walking alone.

First: it was alright in the days when the US was a dominant power, at least in half of the world. Now it may superficially command

¹³ Vali Nasr, *The Dispensable Nation: American Foreign Policy in Retreat* (Victoria:Scribe Publications, 2013), 4-10.

¹⁴ Touqir Hussain Senior, US Institute of Peace, "US Pakistan Relations—the War on Terrorism and Beyond" Special Report No. 145 (Washington), August, 2005, 2-16.

the whole world but its power and influence are no longer incontestable. And that is the central dilemma it faces: how to navigate the transition from hegemony to domination and to leadership. Its recourse to unilateralism could well be an escape from this dilemma.

Second: how does the US adjust to the changing world is not easy as it itself has changed a lot in the past three decades. But unfortunately the changes in America are not in synch with global changes. Americans like to say the 9/11 changed the world. Well, yes and no. The world was already changing except that America did not know about it. And it did not want to know. With the post-Cold War triumphalism America felt it did not need a foreign policy.¹⁵

Third: the rising prosperity at home, and increasing power of the 24/7 cable networks and phenomenal growth in the power of special interests was beginning to influence, and even corrupt, politics in the US in ways not seen before. Politics was also becoming polarized specially after the triumph of conservatism and unrestrained capitalism whose foundations were laid under Reagan. Their political system was always complex but it became even more so as in the last two or three decades as it has increasingly been intersecting with ideology, money, media, public relations, advertising, lobbies, special interests and advocacy groups.

Cable TV and other 24 hour commercial television belonging to big corporations, some big ones like, NBC, ABC and CBS, associated with the entertainment industry like Disney, Time Warner, and Viacom, respectively, the network news is using foreign policy issues as if it was a ball game. The way it plays on foreign policy issues creates its own reality. Expressions such as breaking story, developing story, and minute by minute public opinion polls have tendency to excite people and turn issues into events and strip the foreign policy of its contemplative and reflective dimension and turn into all action--tangible, visible and quantifiable. If the administration is not seen as acting it is seen as clueless and passive, and negotiations are seen as weakness. Vast majority of the American electorate gets its news from them and forms opinion. And it is their opinion the government is most receptive to more than the traditional voices of the academia or respected journalists of print media or established scholars from the non-partisan think tank community.

As the foreign policy becomes a function of mass politics and social media the language and concepts of foreign policy will also change as will be the process of making of US foreign policy. So you have multiple new influences in addition to the traditional ones outlined above playing

¹⁵ Henry Kissinger, *Does America Need a Foreign Policy: Towards a Diplomacy for 21st Century* (New York: Touchstone, 2001), 10-25 and 283-188.

on the making of the US foreign policy—most recent phenomenon the social media and the internet where everything has to be done and understood in “real time.” And it also exacerbates the polarization and fragmentation of public opinion. In a few years’ time it is going to bring fundamental changes in the way people look at foreign policy. This will certainly affect the making of US foreign policy. And that is a subject for another day.

Conclusion

So much ground is covered. Reader must be wondering what message to take away from all this. Here it is. Against this background author has made reader realize that when outsiders only see a tiny fraction of the process of the making of public policy and feel THAT IS IT that is where in the understanding of the US foreign policy they are making a mistake. They oversimplify things when they see any map or any comment coming out of media or a report from a think tank or by a consultant or a former government official specially from CIA and start taking it as the US policy and get alarmed in the process.

The worst mistake outsiders can make is to start reading US policies in Machiavellian or Byzantine terms with great strategic or grand design pulverizing this country and uprooting that, scheming to fashion the world to its image or creating a world order yielding or succumbing to its wishes. No it is not that. American system is not susceptible to a grand design, at least not a successful one. Specially a system in which there is so much noise emanating from the media--regular and social--think tank and strategic establishment, military/industrial complex, and intelligence community. Not to mention the politics, and polarization and plurality and diversity of political thought.

The second thing you should take away from this article is that the system is complex but there is still some simplicity in the decision making process. On issues that are small and uncontroversial the State Department is fully in charge; issues that may be big but do not agitate public opinion that much or do not involve too many other agencies the State Department takes the lead though is not fully in charge, like relations with India or to a degree China or Russia. And in both cases foreign policy works rather well despite America’s peculiar way of relating to the world because all these countries have learnt the way of restraining American power. And now America’s economic vulnerabilities have also come to act as a brake on its over extension. Under Obama specially in his second term the US is trying to step back from the world. So America of today and America of the immediate post 9/11 years are not quite the same.

However issues like terrorism, Pakistan, Iran or the Arab Israel question, the so called Arab Spring and Syria which excite public opinion and the Congress and intersect with domestic politics will continue to be high profile where the White House will remain in charge. In the end on

such issues it is the President and his one or two close advisors who decide. But the systemic issues they have to contend with and other peculiarities of the making of the US foreign policy listed above, do influence the President.

The decision that emerges is not always good as more often than not, it is a compromise which in simple terms may be described as between its strategic interests and domestic politics which does not always advance America's best interests or of the world specially of its allies. Sometimes the compromise is weighted more in favor of strategic interests sometimes in favor of domestic politics. In the end America pays the price for its uniqueness and complexities of its system and indeed its greatness in many respects. Whether it succeeds or fails there is a method in that.

