

Need for Moderation

When Napoleon marched through the streets of Jena, Hegel, a young professor at that time, and a German, rather than grieving the defeat of Germany, had this to say: "This morning I saw the Emperor—this world-soul (*diese Weltseele*)—ride through town....It is a marvelous feeling to see such a personality, concentrated in one point, dominating the entire world from horseback....It is impossible not to admire him." (Hegel wrote to his friend Niethammer, on 13 October 1806). This was Thursday and on Monday, one of the deputies of the 'world soul' came to his apartment and burnt his belongings and poor Hegel was seen imploring for mercy and fleeing his residence with the last pages of the manuscript of 'Phenomenology', his 'labour of love', in his pocket.

What inspired an abiding love for Napoleon in Hegel, was his belief that more than his imperialist ambitions, Napoleon, was seeking to transplant the libertarian vision in alien territories and thus acting as a carrier of the spirit of history.

From Jena to Iraq is a long distance across time and space. But the echoes are very real. The neocon Hegelians would perhaps employ similar adjectives to describe Bush Jr. and his efforts. And as history is a pathetic record of celebration of victory and power, the American internationalism championed by Mr. Bush and his ideologues may soon be imposed as the ruling ideology in conquered spaces. In fact, right during his election campaign, when Mr. Bush talked about favouring a "distinct American Internationalism", the neocons came out with flattering observations that Bush embraced "a distinctly American internationalism" that consists of "idealism, without illusions. Confidence, without conceit. Realism, in the service of American ideals."

Mr. Bush's 'clearest articulation of a policy of global leadership' lays emphasis on greater intervention in world affairs, wherever necessary, as 'an essential part of American greatness'. To non-Americans, contrasting it with the sober and cautious globalism of Mr. Clinton, Mr. Bush looked (and looks so even now) hardheaded and arrogant. Even after assuming power, Mr. Bush did not look strong enough to pursue his agenda. But history has its own way of crowning persons and ideologies. And the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre and Pentagon provided Mr. Bush and the neoconservatives with a historic opportunity to shed the last tinge of inhibition and impose US upon the world as the only 'just' hegemon, other states, nations, societies and cultures have to pay obeisance to.

However, every tale has an anticlimax. And in this case too, the American incertitude about the WMD issue is slowly unfolding and engaging the American public in noisy debates. The international community is waiting in patience to see the unapologetic neo-imperialism advocated by the neocons grounded and sobered by the pricks of public conscience. And anything that does not translate into votes in a democracy has either to be forsaken or improvised. One has already seen William Kristol, onetime neoconservative 'brain of Dan Quayle', fumbling over the issue. Other neoconservatives, while arguing about the need to

follow the intervention in Iraq unapologetically, have discovered the chink in their armour. Given the American passion for democratic values, it will not be too easy on the part of 'Bushmen'— as followers of Mr. Bush are being derided as— to convince the American public about the necessity of waging a senseless war even if it was against the most hated tyrant of this century. The democrats and the paleo-conservatives are waiting in the hustings to expose the lies. The over-enthusiasm of the neocons thus may have exposed the weaknesses of their combative agenda.

It is important for Americans to remember here that as the sole super power, the US has a more responsible role to play in the world today than ever before. They have to ask themselves: "do we need to demonstrate our invincibility and our power in the sandy wastes of Arabia or the hilly terrains of Afghanistan and misconstrue intimidated acquiescence of states as an evolving international consensus and go on brazenly imposing our force on others? And will this be sustainable? And what impact such aggressive ethnocentric internationalism will have on domestic political cultures in multinational and multi-cultural societies the world over? This is something the hawks in the White House and Pentagon will also have to seriously reflect on. Moreover, forgetting Vietnam may prove costly. For no 'daisy cutter' is guarantee enough against subversion and the American provocation through prevarication could give rise to more determined resistance which would prove too difficult to counter even through the most sophisticated fire power and shrewdest of intelligence penetrations.

It is one thing to consciously promote a particular brand of culture. It is quite another to see it spreading on its own through its essential moral appeal and its closer approximation to truth and justice. If the neocons are driven by Machiavel's essential dictum— all armed prophets have succeeded, those unarmed have failed miserably— then they should also remember (as they are sharing the ideals of Christian rightism) the quintessential Biblical saying that offsets this— "The meek shall inherit the earth".