



# DESERT HEAT TO BUDDHIST COMPASSION

How tolerant and patient are the protectors of democracy these days?

This simple question has to be raised in view of the current trend in world politics. When Hilary Clinton paid her historic visit to Myanmar, she along with Aun Saan Souki, proclaimed that some improvement is being made in getting the country back to democracy. What an improvement from the sounds of warring armies, criss-crossing the deserts of Arabian lands?

This visit was long after the 9/11. It was again long after the invasion of Iraq by George W. Bush and co, long after the same company decided to intervene in Afghanistan.

The ousting of the elected leader in Myanmar by the military did take place before 9/11 or any of the invasions were even thought of. The defenders of world democracy were not very perturbed over the events in the Land of Golden Pagodas, at least to the extent of going after the errant rulers as they did in Iraq. Only some warnings and a few sanctions were put on place. The military that took control of the country continued with no interruption. It was long after all other world problems were sorted out that the US and its allies even turned their attention towards Myanmar.

George Bush had no patience to wait for confirmation that Saddam Hussein was in fact having weapons of mass destruction and was in league with Osama bin Laden, before declaring war on Iraq, thus invading sovereign country. He had another grand objective, i.e. to usher in democracy to a land ruled by a dictator. He had his trusted friend John Howard and other allies to go with him.

Has democracy arrived in Iraq? In a way yes, but the death toll daily is not a healthy sign of a free country, with Iraqis killing each other in their hundreds. And what has been the cost of the invasion?

Human cost on both side, Iraq and invaders, has been enormous. The US has sacrificed the lives of more than four thousand soldiers, while the British too have thousands. The number of Iraqis killed in the war has been estimated at 167,000. All this human sacrifice for democracy or the achievement of US ambition of gaining supremacy and control over oil in Iraq?

What was the cost of infrastructure destroyed in the exercise? No one will count that cost. All that will have to be rebuilt and renewed. Cost of that will have to be borne by the new rulers of modern Iraq. How about the contacts that were given to US companies owned by some leading politicians who were behind the war effort? That too will never be known. How about the invaluable historic treasures and antiques plundered during the war? Will these treasures from the 'cradle of civilization' be ever be available for humanity to witness and admire?

How about the expenses for waging the war? Who provided the hardware, bombs, ammunition, and the payment to army personnel etc. Who bears that cost? It is the American public and the people of other countries that joined George Bush in the war, most of whom never would have wanted the invasion.

After all, what was the destruction caused to the environment by the war? That again has to be borne by the victims, for the invaders will go back with no destruction of their environment, but only wounded soldiers to be fended for.

Osama bin Laden who was first an American ally in the fight against Soviet Army that descended on Afghanistan became its hated enemy. Now it was time to go after him. Invasion of Afghanistan was the next step, which too called for more man power and fire power than in Iraq in a way.

George Bush wanted to kill the enemy in a few days but it was left to his successor Barack Obama to finish the job some eight or nine years later. The killing of Obama has not ended the war in Afghanistan which goes on with no end in sight. As I write this France which came to the aid of US, has threatened to withdraw its army from Afghanistan after its soldiers were killed. They may even remain and carry on fighting, but the prospects of finishing the Afghan operation soon and easily are not there. The killing of bin Laden in another country, i.e. Pakistan without its permission or even its knowledge has again brought about quite a lot of ill-feeling and misunderstanding between Pakistan and the US.

Again the cost has to be considered, cost in terms of human lives and material and

infrastructure. How much more is the world prepared to spend on this war? How much more should the world spend on this? Then came the turn of the close friend of US, Hosni Mubarak, who had to be sacrificed for democracy or the urgency to please its supporters. What he did for US in 'rendering' suspects before being sent to Guantanamo was forgotten. US did play a very active part in getting Mubarak to step down. He is now being tried by Egyptian courts.

Most intriguing was perhaps the interest that US took in getting rid of Libyan leader Gaddafi, who was never a friend of theirs, only tolerated for convenience. Not only the US, other Western nations too, were equally keen to see the end of Gaddafi. They came up with the novel idea of 'a no-fly zone' allowing only them to keep bombing targets in Libya so that Gaddafi would not keep fighting for long. He did



not give up, but eventually was defeated. The manner of his killing and the subsequent display of his body were far from satisfactory even if were the dead body of a pet animal. The hatred towards the Libyan dictator was written all over this display.

That was a man revered by his men and the rest of the Arab world for decades. Why should protectors of democracy arrogate to themselves the power to humiliate and desecrate their name? Is that what democracy stands for? Is that the lesson that democracy teaches the world?

No. Apparently the protectors of democracy possess sufficient patience and tolerance in dealing with the target, which will determine the 'modus operandi' in dealing with the situation. When it came to Bahrain these very powers were very patient advising or admonishing the rulers as to how they should accommodate changes to give people a voice in government. It was only recently that its rulers announced changes after so many months of agitation. These powers waited and were happy to see the changes coming.

The case of Syria is far more interesting. The agitation for reform has been going on for almost a year, but nothing so far has been achieved. Reports of people being killed are appearing daily. Arabian countries are sending peace missions to ease the situation. Ruler of

Syria Bashar al Assad is not moved. He still threatens to use a heavy hand in dealing with the trouble-makers, and accuses some Arab nations of helping the rebels. The UN chief has come out with the need to end violence. There is no talk of a 'no fly zone' or assistance to the rebels as was done in the case of Libya. What has changed? Is it the desert climate that has taken a turn for the better? Or have the protectors of democracy learned a lesson in diplomacy and negotiations?

This was something that Mahinda Rajapakse, the President of Sri Lanka tried to teach the world leaders when he addressed the UN General Assembly, but hardly anyone appeared to have taken note of what he said. He spoke about negotiation and quoted the words of Buddha when he advised the rules of Lacchavi, an affluent republic of the day.

'Meet in peace ( or with good will ) . Discuss in peace. Disperse in peace.'

This attitude or the basic human quality was what the defenders of democracy have run out of. This lack of patience and tolerance to talk with another in peace and with respect has been amply displayed by the US and its allies in dealing with Iran on its nuclear program. Old animosities going back to the days when US did everything possible to de-establish the democrat Mossadeq government, are still working. Are the Western powers genuinely interested in removing the threat of nuclear weapons from the world, or are they doing it on a selective basis? Why doesn't someone point out the hidden arsenal that Israel is keeping? Have all these peace-lovers and anti-nuclear activists forgotten about the innocent citizen of Israel, Modercai Vanunu, who had the courage to proclaim to the world that his country has already built its nuclear arsenal? Even the IEAE seems to be quite happy to ignore it. Now it appears Israel is operating on a wide scale, if reports of Mossad involvement in the recent killing of an Iranian nuclear scientist.

Is this the brand of tolerance and genuine interest in peace that world leaders are preaching to the innocent nations and people all over the globe?

Israel on the other hand, is all out to teach a lesson to Iran. This is apparently backed up by the US and its allies. In the current content of world politics and peace-making, there seems to be nothing wrong with that