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US support for Sharon has made situation worse

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FORMER US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger said last week that "The US may attack countries preemptively, topple governments, and kill terrorists - but doing so unilaterally may not make us safer". Indeed the invasion of Iraq and the removal of Saddam Hussein has not made America, the Middle East or the world any safer.

In fact the American preemptive and unilateral action has raised tensions in the region. And its unconditional support for Israel has added to the hostilities in the already troubled Middle East. The latest is the "preemptive" attack of Syria by Israel which has been condoned by Bush who says that "it (Israel) must not feel constrained".

This opens up a third major conflict in the region which is already traumatised by the long-drawn Palestinian-Israeli conflict and the deteriorating situation in Iraq following the unilateral invasion by the US.

"We have one major crisis with Iraq, we have a major crisis with the peace process, we don't need a third one," Marwan Muasher, the Jordanian foreign minister, is reported as saying. "It just throws in another complication, widening the conflict."

Many in the Arab world had opposed the US move to unilaterally invade Iraq and they had warned of increased difficulties and the diversion of attention from the critical and vital issue - the Palestinian-Israeli conflict - that needs to be resolved. Karim T. Kawar, Jordan's Ambassador to Washington, says "Failure in this area is not an option".

Instead of focusing on a possible solution to the conflict, the US with its policies and unconditional support for Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon has made the situation even worse.

Salwa Bamieh, chairperson of the Institute of Management in Jordan, told a seminar in Philadelphia last week that "the US was wrong in attacking Iraq" as it distracts attention from the more important issue of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

Former Turkish President and Prime Minister Suleyman Damirel agreed adding that the deteriorating situation in Iraq affects the peace process.

The Bush Administration had "no tolerance for Saddam as it has for Sharon" and this, according to Salwa, will have far-reaching consequences in the Middle East. She pointed out that the US action, tolerance and support for Sharon has only created other problems.

Sharon was described by Bush as "a man of peace" and is allowed to do whatever he wants - creating more problems and tension in the Middle East. With full backing and support from Washington, Sharon, as Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad pointed out, "is unstoppable".

Now Sharon, who is taking the cue from Bush, says "Israel will strike anywhere and at any time ...in any place and any method". By doing so he is escalating the cycle of violence in the region. But even in the face of the devastation and the heightened problems that these actions create, Bush said: "The decisions that he (Sharon) makes ...are valid decisions. We would be doing the same thing". Indeed, the White House has done so.

John Newhouse argues in his book *Imperial America: The Bush Assault on the World Order* that "the Administration's novel doctrine of preemptive/preventive military strikes gives the President unprecedented war-making power, because the trigger for action is intelligence that he is empowered to deny to the public". A weapon of mass deception, perhaps.

This in a country and for an administration that preaches democracy, transparency, corporate governance and openness to the rest of the world.

Undoubtedly, the US with its unilateral and preemptive policy is spreading its imperialism and hegemony. But Kissinger warns that "It is against America's interests to think of itself as a hegemony ...I say to Americans: It's not in our interest, even if we could, to control the world militarily on our own".

The former Secretary of State argued that "The essence of empire is that every problem becomes our problem ...And sooner or later, every empire eats itself up in domestic disputes."

The domestic problems are piling up for the Bush Administration ahead of the elections next year. The unilateral and preemptive invasion of Iraq is coming under increased criticism. The failure to find the weapons of mass destruction, the prime reason for the invasion, the increasing American casualties, rising cost of reconstruction and the false pretext for the invasion are raising tension at home even as the security situation in Iraq deteriorates and Bush's popularity at home nose-dives. His ally, Tony Blair, is also in trouble at home.

With Washington struggling to stabilise and to rebuild Iraq it has created an "Iraq Stabilisation Group". It will be run by National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice, who co-ordinates foreign policy in the White House. The establishment of the Stabilisation Group implies that US policies in Iraq and Afghanistan are not working.

"There is no exit strategy possible," Kissinger said adding that "We will either succeed or suffer a disaster, a disaster that will affect everybody in the region. ...What is at issue is the future of our relationship with the Islamic world and all the rest of the world."

The New York Times in an editorial also criticised the unilateral policy adding that the Bush administration's "hostile attitude" in dealing with the rest of the world shows "a sense of arrogance and contempt" for international co-operation which will eventually undermine American interests.

That is not all. The Bush White House is fiercely expounding a foreign policy of "either you are with us or against us". This is evident, according to a former senior US administration official, in almost all fields including economic and trade.

He pointed out that the US bilateral free trade agreement with Australia has been put on the fast track. This is because the "Australians put their bodies on the line" in Afghanistan. But the US-New Zealand free trade agreement is not going anywhere as Helen Clark had criticised and then apologised to the US for its unilateral invasion of Iraq.

The official points out that it is a very Texan attitude and underlines the Bush Administration's approach to its foreign relations and its attitude towards other countries. Bush, according to some officials, takes criticism very personally.

A participant at the Eisenhower Fellowship conference in Philadelphia, described the US attitude as "very childish" and unbecoming of the world's most powerful man and nation.

With its power and strength, it can afford to be magnanimous and it does not have to flex its military muscle to prove its might.

Perhaps Bush forgot his own advice during the election campaign when he had said: "If we're an arrogant nation, they'll resent us. If we're a humble nation but strong, they'll welcome us".

But now even the New York Times notes that "Mr Bush has shown a surprising disdain for the kinds of treaties and international agreements that set the tone for America's engagement with the world and that have figured prominently in Washington's foreign policy for most of the years

since World War II".

Could it be that the US, as a senior official pointed out, has become "too powerful for its own good"?