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On the wrong side of history?

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ON THE eve of a long-awaited general election in the late 1950s - the first ever to be scheduled in Pakistan's history - the American ambassador in Karachi coined a colourful metaphor which captures the essence of the 'special relationship' the United States has enjoyed with Pakistan: '...in Pakistan we have an unruly horse by the tail and are confronted with the dilemma of trying to tame it before we can let go safely... I have the uneasy feeling that far from being tamed, this horse we assumed to be so friendly has actually grown wilder of late.'

The promised general election was not held until 1970. On October 8, 1958, the already precariously off-balance politician was thrown off the horse and the general placed in the saddle. It was the first but not the last time that the horse felt the crack of the martial whip.

The device of historical allegory is indispensable in order to fathom the nature of Pakistan's relations with the United States over the past five decades or so. So long as the containment of communism remained the bedrock of American foreign policy. Washington saw no difficulty aligning itself with Pakistan. Hooker A. Doolittle, the American consul-general, put it bluntly in 1948. Muslims might be 'retrograde, uninformed, venal' and given to 'arrogance' but 'an accident of geography... ha[d] put them in parts of the world critical to [US] interests.'

Pakistan at that time was not only the largest Muslim state in the world but 'a potential ally' of America. What was more, Pakistan had men at the helm of state affairs who were infinitely more acceptable than the 'tortuous Hindu who despises as he grovels before or politely infuriates by obfuscation the unclean European.'

Kashmir, the consul-general asserted, was geographically, religiously and 'so far as ignorance and Oriental squalor permit, sentimentally ... part of Pakistan.' Supporting Pakistan's claims on Kashmir would 'compromise... [the United States'] standing with the far greater and richer India... but... so, what?' A policy of neutrality towards the South Asian subcontinent would result in chaos, paving the way for the forward march of communism. Since Britain's influence was receding, the United States had to use her 'prestige' and 'fantastic industrial capacity' to counter all 'insidious propaganda' against the principles Americans held most dear.

Signs of Washington's willingness to do a deal with Pakistan, leaving India out of the reckoning, was sneered at by the British foreign office. The Americans could be 'very rash and stupid about these things', but their 'immature oscillations' would 'do more harm than good.' Adverse reactions to Pakistan's bid for the leadership of the Muslim world are a case in point. King Farouk of Egypt ridiculed Pakistan's Islamic pretensions when he asserted: 'Don't you know that Islam was born on 14 August 1947.'

While dropping the idea of grooming Pakistan as the leader of an Islamic bloc in deference to Egypt and Turkey, the Americans ignored warnings by the British against any security arrangement that kept India out of the equation. In 1954, the United States signed a deal by which in return for military assistance Pakistan would harness its potential to combat communism. And so for a paltry sum of \$25 million for starters, Pakistan undertook to secure Western strategic interests in South-East Asia as well as the Middle East.

As early as December 1951, the director of the State Department's South Asian affairs division had secretly confessed to the British ambassador in Washington that the Americans were 'only too aware' of the complications involved in granting military aid to Pakistan. What was largely forcing the 'tilt' was that 'the Indians ha[d]... been so overplaying their hand' that even if Americans wanted 'to back out', it had become 'virtually impossible' for them to do so.

Pressing Pakistan into their security web naturally meant beefing up its army and supporting military coups when this served US interests. American backing for military dictatorships during the height of the cold war needs no elaboration. The consequences for relations between state and society in many parts of the world have more often than not been disastrous. In Pakistan, the suppression of democratic rights and the ensuing imbalances between elected and non-elected institutions during the cold war era have proven to be of an enduring nature. Extended periods of military rule have wreaked havoc on political processes and the delicate weave of Pakistani society.

Against the backdrop of a parallel arms and drugs economy - the result of General Ziaul Haq's American backed-support for the Afghan resistance movement in the eighties - disaffected youth armed with Kalashnikovs and other sophisticated weapons have been waging total war against rival linguistic communities and sects in addition to fighting running battles with the security forces. The cold war may be over in the rest of the world, but in Pakistan it has taken a deadly toll. Rampant corruption, administrative paralysis and seething hatred among linguistic communities and religious sects have devastated the political, economic and the moral ecology of Pakistan. If the horse was getting wilder in 1958, a combination of domestic, regional and international factors in the final decades of the twentieth century left it gasping to avoid asphyxiation.

As if these pressures were not enough, India provoked an economically enfeebled Pakistani state into conducting nuclear tests in a dangerous tit-for-tat with its most formidable rival in the region. A watershed event, it has in combination with the shifting imperatives of the post-cold War international system made the need for a drastic rethinking of internal and external security arrangements in the subcontinent especially urgent. Bold imagination and innovative approaches are needed if South Asia is to keep pace with the transformations at the international level. These transformations are pointing imperiously to the need for a concerted attempt at recasting the entire spectrum of relations not only domestically between state and civil society in individual countries but also regionally between states. Adjusting to the global changes that are underway, much less accommodating them, requires rare and determined acts of political will.

And yet South Asian leaders seem intent on either keeping their heads buried in the sand or chasing mirages in the hope of short-term political gains. The value of nuclear weapons as a deterrent worked in post-war Europe and also in the stand-off between the United States and the then Soviet Union precisely because the magnitude of the horror forced restraint. Doubts about the exercise of such restraint by India and Pakistan was one important factor in President Clinton's visit to South Asia, a region he has dubbed 'the most dangerous' place in the world.

And as for his flying visit for talks with Pakistan's current leaders in Islamabad, the dangers envisaged by the American presidential security team were plainly in evidence in the form of the decoy used to fly Clinton to Islamabad. The emaciated horse now on its knees, ironically enough, has become a source of acute worry for the USA, anxious to cultivate India for its markets and potential as an ally against a resurgent China.

Far from being tamed, the horse America backed until the end of the cold war and the dismemberment of the Soviet Union seems to have gone completely berserk. The threat of Islamic extremism coupled with military rule and a crumbling economy makes the once dependable Pakistan not only more dangerous but also dispensable. From Kargil, Kashmir to Kandahar, India managed successfully to whip up international support against Pakistan's alleged support for cross-border terrorism. So there is not much cause for surprise that the American president, royally treated by the Indian authorities, decided to chide Pakistan for its disregard of internationally accepted rules of good neighbourly behaviour. After all, seeing the negatives rather than positives of a former ally is an easier way to end a relationship and embark upon a new one.

Is Pakistan then at the end of its relationship with the United States? What is plain from President Clinton's visit to the subcontinent, especially his clandestine entry and quick exit from Islamabad, is that the relationship has been dramatically transformed. If negativities defined India's officially 'neutral' stance at the height of the cold war, dancing to New Delhi's beat is the surest way of achieving American economic and strategic goals in India.

But what of the region as a whole? In a mirror image of their position when Pakistan clambered on board the Western security bandwagon, the Americans are continuing to look at this most troubled region of the world with one eye. It is difficult to fault the centre of the capitalist system from wanting to nurture India as a lucrative economic market. It is even possible to understand why America would want to use India as a counterweight to China. What has not been so easy for most Pakistanis to swallow, far less digest, is the humiliation of being used as a mere door-mat by Mr Clinton during his much trumpeted visit to the subcontinent. Even Bangladesh got off receiving better treatment. The answer that needs to be asked is whether things would have been very different if Pakistan had not gone under military rule in the fall of 1999.

There can be no question that Clinton and his officials would have been more attentive to

polite form. But would his substantive agenda vis-a-vis Pakistan have been radically different? If we are not to confuse the shadow for the substance of America's new post-cold war policy in South Asia, it is necessary to remind ourselves of the direction American policy has been taking in the region since the collapse of the Soviet Union. This has the added merit of taking away any element of shock or surprise attached to Clinton's visit, allowing for a balanced assessment of his blunt message to Pakistan and the posture Pakistan should now adopt in response.

Since the early 1990s, Washington's attitude towards Pakistan has been conditioned by the confusing pulls and pressures of the post-cold war climate, the issue of nuclear non-proliferation and strategic retirements in the Gulf. The decision to suspend military and economic aid to Pakistan in October 1990 was an important turning point in US-Pakistan relations. It led to a sharp deterioration of relations with the army high command, particularly the army chief General Mirza Aslam Beg. This was something of a departure from the trend in US relations with the upper echelons of the Pakistani military and bureaucracy set in motion as early as 1951.

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New American agenda in the region

EARLY signs of the trend were already in evidence during the later stages of the war in Afghanistan. Close observers could see that the Pakistani army, with its own perceptions of regional interest, was no longer willing to be a pliable tool of American national security interests. And indeed the Pakistan army has pursued its own interests in the region with few, if any, real concessions to the United States.

This, it hardly needs spelling out, is the nub of the problem. Neither Pakistan's support for the Taliban in Afghanistan, nor its active promotion of the Kashmiri cause is conducive to the furtherance of the new American agenda in the region. Needing to court India, America had to shun Pakistan which was all too easy now that the erstwhile ally had grown wings of its own. It was this unacknowledged breakdown of relations between the United States and the Pakistani army since the fall of 1990 which imbued Mian Nawaz Sharif, a leader with a political base and a sense of opportunity, with relative confidence to take on the military establishment. Misinterpreting the ground realities and brazenly miscalculating on all fronts, the former prime minister has been left to rue his fate.

Among the errors Sharif made was to confuse America's importance as the only superpower in the world with its capacity to influence the Pakistani military establishment. There are Pakistanis who actually believe that America controls events in this country. Yet seeing the American hand in every major development in the country has also become a convenient pretext for doing nothing. In that sense, Clinton's visit - confirming a trend that has been in the making for nearly a decade - is a welcome corrective. It forces Pakistanis to take honest stock of their situation and make decisions which, though difficult and painful, will in the long run reap better results than those brought about by myopic policies adopted while the country remained trapped within the web of American-sponsored Western security alliances. For one thing, American foreign policy in Pakistan has been more state- than people-centred;

it has meant backing certain ruling configurations, not striving to help improve the living conditions of the vast majority of its people. With post-colonial ruling elite determined to nurture ignorance, not mass education, as its partners, the United States has contributed in large part to the processes that have militated against the prospects of a democratic Pakistan. So it is not difficult to spot the blot in America's posturing as the great champion of democracy.

Yet, having ridden uncontested at the helm of capitalism's victory bandwagon, the United States has been undergoing a serious reassessment of its foreign policy goals in the new international world order. Among the rules of international relations which Americans have had reason to embrace with alacrity in the post-cold war era is that there is no such thing as a permanent friend or ally. Friends are made and unmade depending on self-interest. So nothing will be served by blaming America for Pakistan's multiple ills. The responsibility for their manifold failures ultimately rests on those who have been at the apex of state power in Pakistan. Rejecting every idea attributable to America in a fit of cynicism, of which there is plenty in this country, will not help drive Pakistan out of the dangerous corner it is in today. Keeping an open mind alone will generate the momentum Pakistan needs to rethink its positions, cutting its losses when necessary and maximizing the advantages wherever possible. With this in view let me turn to Clinton's visit to the subcontinent, leaving some time for comment on how Pakistan might tackle the challenge of being 'dumped' by America when it is facing a military threat from India and its economy is in tatters.

Although there is as yet no national consensus on foreign policy, the main objectives of the United States in the post-cold war world is the promotion of American commercial interests through free trade, the championing of democracy and, when necessary, assuming the role of global policeman by intervening militarily in the name of protecting human rights and fighting international terrorism. These principles have been touted about with dazzling fanfare, not always with unanimous applause, ever since the demise of the Soviet Union. So if Pakistan is feeling terribly pinched by the new found American attitude, it is by no means alone in experiencing the cold winds of exclusion. Most of America's erstwhile allies have been coming to realize, sooner or later, that the only honourable future in the new global order, of which the United States is uncontestedly the kingpin, is to be able to stand alone. If the Pakistanis, steeped as they are in the continuing legacies of the cold war, were indeed napping on this issue, the fault is entirely their own.

On the face of it, there was nothing that Clinton said in his message to the people of Pakistan that has not been said, one way or the other, by a succession of American State Department officials in the past few years. What was significant was the decision to 'go directly' to the people of Pakistan, an ironic twist to a relationship that thrived in the past precisely because it remained narrowly state-centred. Never the most convincing proponents of democracy, the Americans until recently were the ardent supporters of Pakistan's own home-grown general, Zia-ul-Haq, who ruled this country with an iron fist for eleven long years.

But it would be erroneous to take too light a view of the current American concern to be seen to be on the side of all things democratic. There are laws that prohibit the American establishment from dealing with military dictators which the complexities of US domestic politics in any case make it difficult to sustain without a matching loss of credibility. So why was Islamabad so anxious to hear what it already knew? Wouldn't it have been infinitely

better to let Clinton hob-nob with the very brand of 'fundamentalists' he so religiously condemns in an effort to advance America's commercial profile, all the while turning a blind eye to human rights violations in Kashmir, and quietly return to his den in Washington after an extravagant all-paid for expedition in India? Those who fear Pakistan's growing isolation in the international system would loudly disagree. But can they with equal conviction explain the precise reasons for Clinton's door-mat visit to Pakistan, conducted in the most astonishing display of security paranoia at the most outlandish expense? A script worthy of a thriller, it inspired one British journalist to proffer one of the more insightful comments on the visit. Describing it as 'one of the most extraordinary journeys of the Clinton presidency', the correspondent of *The Independent* noted that Islamabad was 'a city without a people in a country without a voice.' Echoing the sentiments of Pakistanis incensed at the ease with which control of Islamabad was virtually handed over to American security agents, the paper thought there was 'something almost sinister about President Clinton's cortege, his long, sleek limousine swishing at 60 mph down the empty autobahn ... it was like a scene from *On The Beach* when the American submariners discover an undamaged San Francisco whose population has already died of radiation sickness.'

What was eerie was the absence of people in the streets, a slip on the part of a president eager to snub the military dictator by appearing to appeal directly to the common person. The plan which Clinton laid out in his televised address was the restoration of democracy in Pakistan, creating the conditions for a peaceful resolution of the Kashmir problem and winning international sympathy for the human tragedy in that region through non-violent means; channelling scarce resources from nuclear and other military programmes and focusing on development as well as signing the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). In a nutshell, the American president's message was to ask Pakistanis to decide whether they wanted to continue playing with fire, thereby ushering in an economic collapse and potential war, or to take the path of least resistance in an attempt to ensure 'economic security and peace.' So far, so good. But there was little by way of reassurance from the leader of the strongest power in the world that redirecting their energies to 'regional peace' would pay Pakistan real post-cold war dividends.

The 'only if you do as I tell you attitude' in any case blended awkwardly with Clinton's patronizing tone when he warned Pakistanis of the comeuppance of people who try 'redrawing borders with blood.' Even if it were possible to excuse Clinton for trying to whitewash New Delhi's human rights record in Kashmir, his distortion of the historical record cannot be left uncorrected. The problem in Kashmir has not been about people trying to redraw borders with blood but the forcible imposition of borders where ties of blood spill across any artificially created frontiers. Moreover, the Clinton solution to the Kashmir dispute, reduced to the 'Four Rs' of restraint, respect for the line of control, renunciation of violence and renewal of talks with India, falls well short of the fifth 'R', namely, a resolution of this long-standing problem.

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Getting back on the right side of history

THIS is not to deny that Pakistan's policy on Kashmir has for the most part been based more on knee-jerk reactions than any careful assessment of the pros and cons of backing armed

militancy in pursuit of the aim of extricating that region from the jaws of the Indian military juggernaut. With the Kargil episode, Pakistan lost face in the international system. The contradictory voices emanating from the highest echelons of the then democratic Pakistan were a rude shock for anyone with elemental common sense. To stiffly deny involvement in the war for the Kargil heights in one breath and offer to help withdraw the forces on the other is simply one of the more blatant gaffes of the Nawaz era. And it has not been easy to live it down. The isolation of Pakistan that we hear so much of these days is not because of America's sudden change of heart. It owes everything to half-baked policies and hasty political manoeuvres that, sadly enough, were more narrowly focused and self-interested than broadly conceived and nationally motivated.

What then should Pakistan do to respond to Clinton's brutal ultimatum? Should it just throw in the towel or continue the policy of sustaining low intensity warfare against India in the vain expectation of one day wresting Kashmir from New Delhi's control? Above all, should the Kashmir cause take precedence over Pakistan's own internal and external security? If Pakistan is placing its internal security at a serious risk by allowing militant organizations to train and arm its citizens to fight Indian security forces in Kashmir, will its external security be assured by giving up the cause altogether? Clinton and the pro-India lobby will answer in the affirmative. By giving up on Kashmir, as it were, Pakistan can court peace and economic prosperity. But is this a realistic policy given the domestic political scenario and the deeply entrenched interests of the army and the state's various intelligence agencies in the Kashmiri freedom struggle? Apart from the logistical stumbling-blocks in renouncing Kashmir, Pakistan has a moral responsibility in supporting the freedom struggle of a people so long denied the elementary right of choice in shaping their own destiny. Can this moral responsibility be balanced with a more circumspect policy towards Kashmir, one that is on the right of side of history as it is unfolding in this troubled region and not just one that succumbs to the Indian or even the American view of sanctifying territorial borders at the cost of human beings? So long as Kashmir continues to be treated as pawn in a dangerous chess game between India and Pakistan, there can be no hope of peace in South Asia. In fact it is difficult to envisage any sort of solution of the Kashmir dispute within the old paradigm of Indo-Pakistan claims and counter-claims.

By appearing to endorse India's stand on Kashmir, by wilfully fudging his own stance on human rights in an effort to condemn the terrorism Pakistan claims to be a 'jihad', Clinton for all practical purposes has done more to increase the likelihood of war between the two congenital rivals than create the conditions for peace in South Asia. Thanks to the American presidential extravaganza, bringing down the temperatures this summer will require a lot more than just curbs on the more rebarbative of the religious militant groups currently using Pakistani territory and human are sources to mount their jihad in Kashmir. There can be no one-sided solution to Kashmir short of all-out war between India and Pakistan.

Under the circumstances, the best way forward for Pakistan would be to declare unilaterally that its long-standing support for Kashmiri self-determination has reached the stage where all options, short of the continued Indian stranglehold over the state, would be acceptable, including the much maligned (though little considered) 'third option.' If Pakistan's stance on Kashmir is not motivated by territorial ambitions, as we are hearing of late, then the only proper course to adopt is to insist that the Kashmiris must be allowed to decide for themselves the power sharing arrangements that can best accommodate the delicate balance

between communities and sub-regions in the state of Jammu and Kashmir. Pakistan would go a long way in restoring its credibility if it formally retracted its territorial claims on Kashmir and instead demanded internationally enforced restraint on India's military war machine to allow the people of that state their elementary human rights, including the right to decide their future not only vis-a-vis one another but also the two main regional powers in South Asia. By focusing on human rights rather than 'jihad', Pakistan would inch closer to attaining its main objective in Kashmir without jeopardizing its own security in the process. Apart from striking just the right balance between power and principle in Kashmir, there is much that Pakistan can do to restore its international image and secure its economic future, both necessary concomitants to the requirement of being able to go it alone in a post-war world dominated by a superpower unabashedly committed to the pursuit of its own narrowly construed self-interest. To mention only a few, there is no reason why Pakistan should hold off the decision to sign the CTBT except the fear of agitating those crying themselves hoarse in the wilderness of its domestic politics.

Given the political will, it should also be possible to arrive at a satisfactory solution to the problem of international power projects for which, however short-sightedly, Pakistan had given its sovereign agreement. The sooner Pakistan resolves the IPP issue, the better it would be for its attempts to attract future foreign investments, vital if there is to be any revival of its stagnant economy. As for Pakistan's alleged support of 'terrorism', no point will be served in trying to convince the outside world of the merits of 'jihad.' the more so since the international climate is virulently anti-Islamic and Pakistan's advocacy of a concept deeply rooted in the Islamic tradition, for from winning it laurels, deepens the suspicion in which it is currently held not only in the West but also its regional neighbours.

It is admittedly going to be far more difficult for the Pakistani state to pull the rug from under the feet of the various militant organizations that have mushroomed in the past couple of decades. But that is the crux of the dilemma Islamabad is facing as it tries countering the forces that are being galvanized to declare it a 'rogue' or a 'terrorist' state. Living dangerously without committed friends in an international system geared to promoting economic prosperity and a semblance of peace is not an option Pakistan can afford to bank on. Even as it should concentrate on putting its own house in order with a view to restoring substantive, and not merely formal, democracy, Pakistan has no choice but to find some way of striking healthy balance between its own self-perceptions and interests and the changing requirements of the world.

There are many factors which, if seized upon with consummate skill at the political as well as diplomatic levels, can help in facilitating the transition Pakistan must now invariably make. For one thing, there is as yet nothing hard and fast about American foreign policy in the post-cold war era. If certain objectives are becoming clearer, there are others that are still being debated and many more that have yet to enter the public discourse on the precise role America has to play in the new global order.

Profitable investments in the Indian market as well as the economic opportunities afforded to American business by the oil reserves in Central Asia require a modicum of peace and stability in the region as a whole. Down but not out, Pakistan can still be made to count in American foreign policy. To do so effectively, Pakistanis both at home and abroad will have to work in concerted fashion to contest the negative images of their country in the United

States as well as internationally. A tall order to be sure, it has become a necessity in a world where there are no permanent friends, only temporary partners who come together in mutual self-interest and move away when these interests are no longer served.

Clinton's visit to India has been an important milestone in the history of Indo-US relations. But for all the beginnings and promises made, India and the United States are still very far from seeing eye to eye on key issues or, for that matter, sealing an exclusive partnership in pursuit of their respective objectives vis-a-vis each other in South Asia and the world at large. Nothing clinched, nothing gained could well turn out to be one of the more memorable outcomes of Clinton's South Asian visit, as sceptics in America are already suggesting, albeit in muffled voices. It is true that Clinton has gone through all the motions to formally distance the United States from Pakistan. But can a starry one-eyed American policy towards India bring economic prosperity and peace to the region without squaring the Kashmiri circle and accounting for Pakistan's genuine security concerns?

The Indian leadership has been staking a bid for a permanent seat in the UN Security Council. Does the pro-India tilt in American policy signal the start of a process towards that Indian aim? Whatever the reassuring voices from the American establishment might aim at conveying to New Delhi, India's quest for a permanent seat on the Security Council will require far more than Washington's beneficence. Restructuring the Security Council is a highly complex and technical issue. In the event that India's prized objective of a permanent seat is thwarted, and there is no move to give it equality of status in the nuclear club of the most powerful countries in the world, how will New Delhi react once its aspirations are frustrated? Will the process of liberalization in India, still mired in considerable bureaucratic red tape and the bete noire of anti-imperialist sentiments, give American business the free hand it expects in return for its investments?

The formula when things did not quite go the American way was stated unambiguously by a US ambassador in the early 1950s. The United States 'should be no more annoyed if a given policy or course of action backfires than the scientist whose test-tube explodes in his face. We should merely chalk it up to clinical experience and be the wiser and start off again'. The coming months will tell how the experience and wisdom the United States accumulated after five long decades of close involvement in Pakistan's internal affairs ultimately meshes with Washington's budding romance with India, the world's largest democracy and also the one market whose potential for American business, although very great, remains to be fully realized.

One lesson which ought to be quickly revised by Pakistanis and learned by the Indians, once and for all, is that it was American hegemony since the 1950s that helped cast the Pakistani state structure into an enduring mould, one which is now showing signs of acute stress and strain. Elections are a necessary but not a sufficient condition for the full restoration of democracy. Political processes in Pakistan have yet to be liberated from the clutches of an inequitable state structure which in its quest for legitimacy has used Islam in the past and is now competing with the political leadership in the race to be the upholders of both religion and democracy. The superficial resolution of the long-standing contradiction between political processes and the state structure in the successive elections since 1988 merely scratched the surface of the formidable political, economic, social and ideological dilemmas. To insist that Pakistan concentrate mainly on the form and not the substance is to deny it the

possibility of trying to build the kind of institutional structures it desperately needs to make democracy a live reality rather than just a by-product of America's freshly minted foreign policy aims.

In a most telling comment on the self-centred and imperious nature of American attitudes in the new global order, Brent Scowcroft, a former US national security adviser, recently lamented. 'We don't think as much about the effects of our actions on other people. We don't consult, we don't ask ahead of time. We behave to much of the world like a latter-day colonial power. It's a very dangerous thing that's happening.' Whatever the advantages New Delhi can detect in exploiting this American tendency, the time has certainly come for Pakistan to grasp the nettle and begin thinking itself anew if it truly wants to get back on the right side of history in order to stave off some of the more dangerous implications of the American way of doing business in the post-cold War era. **Concluded**