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Gulf News: Once Again a Skewed Strategy.

Pascal Boniface
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Football coaches used to say: "We do not change a winning team." US President George W. Bush should be more inclined to say: "We do not change a losing strategy."

Washington has recently released its latest national security strategy document titled The National Security Strategy of the United States of America. The earlier one was published in spring 2002 and was a follow-up of Bush's State of the Union Address and his "axis of evil" speech of 2002. These two documents in fact laid the ground work for the 2003 Iraq War.

One could have hoped that after facing all sorts of difficulties in Iraq, Bush and his team would have changed their minds and adopted a new kind of strategy. Not at all. It appears that US strategists had a field day while drafting the new document since it appears to be more or less the duplication of the earlier one.

The tone is immediately set. While presenting the document, Bush's first sentence was "America is at war". Not really comforting for his fellow citizens.

There's is no surprise in guessing who the enemy is. Terrorism is presented as "an aggressive ideology of hatred and murder". Due to political correctness, it doesn't link terrorism to Islamism and even radical Islamism.

More importantly, it doesn't answer the question on how and why terrorism has become so powerful. Probably the answer to it should appear too difficult and too touchy. The document even stated that terrorism is neither a result of hostility to the US policy in Iraq nor a result of Israeli-Palestinian issues.

Only explanation

For sure one cannot think that these conflicts are the only explanations of terrorism. But it is difficult to deny the obvious link between them. Therefore terrorism must be fought without a clear vision of its nature and its sources. But it is not the best way to defeat it.

The document states: "We have kept our offensive against terrorist networks, leaving our enemy weakened but not yet defeated.

"The war against terror is not over. America is safer but not yet safe. As the enemy adjust to our success so too must we adjust. We understand better why the war will last so long. The enemy, like a virus becomes immune to a vaccine, is always changing its strategy. So it would be a war for ever."

The end of the tunnel is not in sight.

The US national security strategy is founded on two pillars the first one is promoting freedom, justice, human dignity (ironically Guantanamo and Abu Ghraib are not mentioned) and working to end tyranny. For sure it is not a matter of a short period.

The second pillar is confronting the challenges of our times from the threat of pandemic disease to proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, human trafficking, natural disasters and so on

and therefore effective multilateral efforts are essential. But the one who believes that it means a US conversion to multilateralism should stop to dream.

The document outlines the role the US should play by stating: "America must continue to lead." This is the US vision of multilateral and collective action.

But even more importantly, it gives the US the right to preemptive military actions.

To prevent hostile acts by their adversaries Washington will, if necessary, act "preemptively in exercising its right of self defence". But this definition of legitimate defence is neither legal nor consistent. By definition, legitimate defence, as it is mentioned in the United Nations charter is possible only after an attack. Otherwise it is pure aggression which is forbidden.

For sure the United States proclaims that it will not use force in all cases of emerging threats. Such an option of war being a rightful option for a state prevailed before the Second World War and is now brought to the fore by Washington, which is again against the UN charter.

Precisely to avoid states from going to war, the UN charter has forbidden the use of force in international relations, except in the case of legitimate defence and collective decision by the UN Security Council.

The problem with the US is that this aggressive tone does not reflect its real potential. For sure the capability of the US military is impressive. It more or less spends half of the amount spent on military expenditure in the world. No doubt it is unique, but it doesn't give the US the freedom to do what it pleases.

Theodore "Teddy" Roosevelt has said a century ago: "You have to speak softly but with a big stick." Bush is speaking loudly with a little (but costly) stick.

Dr Pascal Boniface is the founder and director of IRIS (Institut de Relations Internationales et Stratégiques). He has published or edited more than 40 books dealing with international relations, nuclear deterrence and disarmament, European security and French international policy.