

## **US under President Bush: Its Negative Image Overseas**

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The image of the US under the Bush administration in overseas has been a catastrophic after the launch of the Iraqi war in March 2003.

Democrat Senator Robert Byrd of West Virginia aptly described the image of his country as follows: “Today I weep for my country. No more is the image of America one of strong, yet benevolent peacekeeper... Around the globe, our friends mistrust us, our word is disputed, our intentions are questioned. We flaunt our superpower status with arrogance,”

Another Senator Ted Kennedy of Massachusetts also indicated that the Iraqi war was launched on false pretences and said further: “By going to war in Iraq, we have strained our ties with long-standing allies around the world—allies whose help we clearly and urgently need on intelligence, on law enforcement and militarily. We have made America more hated in the world and made the war on terrorism harder to win.”

On 27<sup>th</sup> June, the Washington-based Pew Research Centre has released a report that distrust of the US has intensified across the world. It said that “anti-Americanism since 2002 has deepened. It has worsened among America’s European allies and is very, very bad in the Muslim world”.

Majority of countries reject the main planks of current US foreign policy and express distaste for American-style democracy, the survey found. Respondents worldwide not only want Washington to pull US troops out of Iraq as soon as possible but also seek a rapid end to American and NATO military intervention in Afghanistan, now in its sixth year.

The survey, conducted in April and May, is by far the largest Pew has carried out since 2002, covering 47 countries in Europe, Asia, the Middle East, Africa and Americas and assessing the opinions of more than 45,000 people.

Over the past five years, favourable ratings for the US have decreased in 26 of the 33 countries. Pew report said : “Global distrust of American leadership is reflected in increasing disapproval of the cornerstone of US foreign policy.” Many think that Iraq would go down in history as the greatest disaster in American foreign policy.

Asked by the Pew research project, whether they liked American ideas about democracy, they sent back an unflattering message. In many countries, the answer was overwhelmingly “no”. Negative views prevailed in 33 of 47 countries.

The poll has an interesting reading and found among others:

- (a) The country where America's image is worst is Turkey, a NATO ally, where only 9% per cent have a favourable view, down from 52% per cent before the US went into war with Afghanistan and Iraq.
- (b) In Germany, traditionally one of the closest allies, only 30% per cent have a positive view, down from 78% before President Bush took office in January 2001
- (c) Support for America's so-called war on terrorism has plummeted since 2002, especially in Europe, where US practices against inmates at the Guantanamo Bay and Abu Ghraib prisons have been harshly condemned.
- (d) There is a widespread perception that the US under President Bush acts unilaterally in making international policy decisions. This is especially powerful in Europe, shared by 90% in Sweden, 89% in France, 70% or more in Britain, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Germany, Russia, Slovakia, and Spain.
- (e) A full 83% per cent Canadians believe that their neighbour ignores their interests, Middle Easterners overwhelmingly share this view, as do many Asians, including US ally-countries, South Korea and Japan.
- (f) About the crisis in the Middle East, Arabs in the region were pessimistic with more than 70% per cent in Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait and the Palestinian territories believing that "the rights and needs of Palestinian people cannot be taken care of as long as the state of Israel exists."

This negative image of America exists although the State Department spends reportedly US\$1 billion per year to reverse the image and President Bush's close friend from Texas Karen Hughes has been appointed as the Under Secretary of State for building positive image around the world.

The difficulty, according to George Soros, a billionaire in US, is that America had fallen into hands of extremist ideologues, led by Vice-President Dick Cheney, and former Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld and his deputy Paul Wolfowitz. According to him, they have successfully manipulated a born-again President Bush and a feel-good public. But there is a reality that exceeds their comprehension and that has rendered their policies counterproductive.

Soros further has stated in his book titled "*The Age of Fallibility*" (2006) that the root cause of trouble "is a false metaphor, the war on terror. It has done terrible damage to our standing in the world and endangered our open society at home."

US cannot start repairing the damage until it is ready to repudiate the false metaphor of the war on terror. Fighting terror with war is like fighting fire with petrol. War is fuel for terrorism, not a deterrent. What is the true deterrent? Peace, love and understanding are some of the most powerful weapons against anti-terrorism. That means winning the hearts and minds of people who are engaged in violence.