

NOTE

CHALLENGING US HEGEMONY

Bharat Dogra writes :

At present two serious challenges to the USA's hegemonistic aspirations have emerged—Iran and Venezuela. There are important differences and similarities between the two challengers. The obvious difference is that the challenge offered by Venezuela's Chavez is from an essentially secular platform, while the Iran regime has its base in religious fundamentalism. Another difference is that the antagonism of the USA for this religious fundamentalism based regime in Iran has continued for about three decades, while in the case of Venezuela this antagonism has much recent origins beginning with the Chavez years.

An important similarity is that the two challenges did not develop on their own, it was the superpower which provoked them with highly aggressive statements and actions. Iran was dubbed a part of the 'axis of evil'. Efforts were made to overthrow the Chavez-led government in Venezuela.

Another similarity is that both challenges are led by outspoken individuals-Chavez and Ahmadinejad. However while Chavez now holds the supreme position in his country, Ahmadinejad's role is limited by constitutional provisions which give supreme authority to religious leadership.

A crucial common point is that both countries have very significant deposits of oil and/or gas, and have gained financially from recent increase in oil/gas prices. Thus, ironically though, the USA's recent hegemonistic actions have actually brought significant economic benefits to them (as well as to Russia) which in turn have helped them to pursue a higher regional role (Iran in the Middle east, Venezuela in the Americas) to which they aspire.

These challenges to US hegemony deserve wider support, particularly keeping in view the fact that recently hostile action was initiated by the USA in both cases. Chavez's highly aggressive comments against Bush are after all mere talk, while the USA had actually supported action to pull down his lawfully elected government.

There are several aspects of Iran's policies-domestic and foreign-with which those who stand for peace and human rights will disagree, but that should not prevent them from unitedly opposing any assault on Iran? However Iran can help to raise support for itself by improving its record for human rights, religious tolerance and women's rights, as well as possibly providing cheaper oil to some of the poorest countries dependent on oil and gas imports.

Opposition to US hegemony by Iran, Venezuela or anyone else should generally be supported because US hegemony has evolved as the single most important threat to world peace and democracy. Ultimately it is increasingly enlightened and assertive world opinion that can pose the most significant challenge to the hegemony of the USA. □□□