

Ideals and Realities

As the Contra scandal confirms suspicions that Watergate was no aberration, **M Iqbal Asaria** looks at two studies that try to delve into the roots of the malaise.

The Rape of a Noble Ideology - USA in Perspective 1783-1985, by Aslam Munjee, *First Amendment Publishers, California, USA, 1986, 484pp, \$29.95*

The Price of Power - Kissinger in the Nixon White House, By Seymour M Hersh, *Summit Books, New York, 1983, 700pp.*



Henry Kissinger: The master Op-Con artist. His deviousness has become legion

ONE of the salient points to emerge from the present imbroglio of the US administration, is the power exercised by unelected and at times shady operators in the State Department, the National Security Council, the Central Intelligence Agency and a host of other bodies which constitute the executive arm of any US presidency. Indeed, it would appear that there is almost a predisposition in all these bodies to 'abuse' the power vested in them.

Before examining the explanations and machinations for this subversion of democracy detailed in the two studies under consideration it is well to put the whole episode into perspective. The US establishment or the US people for that matter, are not against covert operations, bribery, political assassinations or imposition of US will on other peoples. What becomes clear when one examines the recent scandal of arms sales and diversion of funds to Contra rebels, or the financial scandals now rocking leading establishments on Wall Street, or the long chain of covert operations, or the dramatic bribery trials of the early seventies, is that the only point at issue was whether US law was broken or US people deceived.

Thus in the case of Nicaragua, the International Court of Justice at the Hague, found the US guilty of breaking the law by mining Managua harbour. The US refused to recognise the jurisdiction of the court in this matter and since no US law was broken, no further consequences followed as far as the US people were concerned. Similarly, when in the early seventies, major corporations like Lockheed were involved in massive bribery in-

vestigations, the only point at issue was non-declaration to US shareholders! In the case of covert operations, President Reagan's latest dictum that these should stand up to public scrutiny it revealed reiterates the same principle with vivid clarity.

It is this context which poses the greatest problem for Munjee's engaging and detailed exposition of the American dream gone sour. In his great zeal for expounding the vision of the Founding Fathers Munjee is forced to gloss over the fact that some forty million Red Indians had to pay with their lives to let this vision germinate. In a similar vein to the colonialists' cry for plundering the globe in the name of 'civilising the heathens', the American settlers decimated the native Indian population with little remorse, if any. The roots for establishing a predatory hegemony on the globe were thus firmly set.

Within these parameters, Munjee attempts to define the 'American Dream'. He says, "Historically, the world's poor had believed that were equal to the nobility, if only they had the opportunity. Here, then, would be the acid test. In his preface to *The Columbiad* poet Joel Barlow was soon to voice the idealistic dream: 'This is the moment to give such a direction to poetry, printing and the other fine arts, that true and useful ideas of glory may be implanted in the minds of men here, to take place of the false and destructive ones that have degraded the species in other countries'. ... This was then, the core, the quintessence of the true American spirit, the real American Dream provided by the idealist intellectuals."

Munjee, after examining the 'noble'

ideals of the Founding Fathers in depth, looks at the emergence of the military-industrial complex and the Op-Con (Opportunistic Conservative) culture, which with media manipulation has managed to mould the American people in its image. The vice-like grip of the Op-Con establishment is now firmly in place and Munjee concedes, "Our total enslavement by the Power Cartel is the cause, but in the final analysis, it is the people who must take the blame in a democracy. The power and onslaught of the power Cartel media has been overwhelming, with its highly skilled technique to delve into the innermost recesses of the public mind and exploit fully the vestiges of feudal weaknesses. No public, anywhere, could have withstood the onslaught any better than the American public. In fact, the Power Cartel media policy, as yet relatively weaker in some other countries, has succeeded in enslaving the public even faster than the US public has been."

The sentiment is echoed by William Rees-Mogg in a recent article in *The Independent*: "The proposition that has to be explored is the decline of the effectiveness of the United States. There is an historical point of view which sees almost the whole of the twentieth century as a corruption of the idealism of the Old America, a view expressed by William James at the first stirrings of American imperialism, and argued now with conviction by Gore Vidal. Certainly Teddy Roosevelt, the prophet of American imperialism, is an historic figure who seems the more repulsive the more one thinks about him."

Munjee, after expounding the American Dream does look at the

Nixon and Carter eras to get at the purveyors of the the Op-Con culture. He provides a useful framework in which to see Seymour Hersh's study of *Kissinger in the Nixon White House*. This focus on US foreign policy under one of the most illustrious Op-Con artist, provides a wealth of material to assess how far the reality has diverged from the ideal.

Hersh, an experienced and well-connected journalist, has unearthed and pieced together the whole gamut of Kissinger's operations from the days before he became National Security Adviser to President Nixon. Even before the election campaigns hotted up Kissinger put feelers to both the Democrat and the Republican candidates that his services were available. Indeed, at that time he was more wedded to the Democrats than the Republicans. However, as the campaign progressed he soon manoeuvred himself into the Nixon camp and was duly appointed as the National Security Adviser after the election.

Before the elections were over, he had already sabotaged Johnson's chances of reaching an accord with the Vietnamese by sending clear signals that, if elected, Nixon would give them a better deal. Thus was initiated a career in double-dealing and total lack of accountability.

Once in position, Kissinger set about monopolising the NSC and spreading his tentacles over other departments, particularly the State Department. He got Halperin to draft a new structure for the NSC. As Hersh says, "The projected system gave Kissinger the power to decide the agenda for the National security Council meetings and also made him chairman of the review group that considered the various option papers prepared by the bureaucracy. Under the existing machinery, that function had been controlled by the State Department. In addition, Halperin's memorandum gave Kissinger direct authority to order State and other agencies to prepare option papers on specific subjects; such orders were known as National Security Study Memoranda (NSSM). The President's policy decision, to be made after a National Security Council meeting, would take the form of a highly classified National Security Decision Memorandum written by Kissinger and his staff."

The structure was used in a typically devious manner by Kissinger. As the author says, "In its first month in office, Kissinger's staff issued twenty-two NSSMs requesting broad studies on every important issue before the

new administration. Yet as Kissinger concedes in his memoirs, the most important decisions were made without informing the bureaucracy, and without the use of NSSMs or NSDMs." But "By early 1971, NSC staff aides had long realised that Kissinger was using the Halperin plan to create make-work for State and Pentagon officials that got them out of the way. "What we did was to kill them with NSSMs," one NSC aide recalls."

Kissinger then set about the real business of the state. Thus "by mid-March 1969 they (Nixon and Kissinger) would secretly begin bombing Cambodia with B-52 aircraft, the eight-engine jets that were the core of the strategic bombing fleet. The bombing became a turning point not only in the war but also in the mentality of the White House. The secret of that bombing - and hundreds of later missions - would be kept for five years. Eventually, the secret became more important to the White House than the bombing." It was the secretive and highly controversial operations that ultimately led to the whole wire-tapping operation which finally undid the duo in the celebrated Watergate affair.

Journalists who happened to chance upon the many leads to such covert operations became the prime target of Kissinger's wrath. Moreover, Nixon was quickly developing a drink problem. A lot of effort went into covering up the fact that during critical NSC and other meetings Nixon was drunk. Power had truly passed into Kissinger's hands and he relished it.

Kissinger was a master in the art of deception and held most other people in contempt. While praising Nixon in his presence he would pass snide remarks about him once he had left the meeting. With foreign leaders, Kissinger's contempt knew no bounds. Hersh relates an incident with General Valdés, Chile's Foreign Minister. At one point in his discussion Valdés told Nixon that "Latin America was sending back 3.8 dollars for every dollar in American aid." Kissinger's retort was swift, at a private luncheon shortly afterwards. "As Valdés describes it, Kissinger began by declaring, "Mr Minister, you made a strange speech. You come here speaking of Latin America, but this is not important. Nothing important can come from the South. History has never been produced in the South. The axis of history starts in Moscow, goes to Bonn, crosses over to Washington, and then goes to Tokyo. What happens in the

South is of no importance. You're wasting your time."

Hersh continues, "The Valdés incident showed the White House attitude: Like a child, Latin America was to be seen and not heard. Those who defied Nixon, such as Valdés and Eduardo Frei - and, later, Salvador Allende - were to be treated harshly."

With this sort of structure and these kinds of attitudes, Kissinger had a free hand to effect far-reaching changes in the direction of US foreign policy. The end of Vietnam war, the groundwork for the SALT treaties, the opening to China etc are well known and documented. What is less commented upon is Kissinger's masterly service to Israel. By putting the Zionist state as a major plank of the US's policy towards the Soviet Union, he was able to thwart all plans for pressure on Israel to relinquish occupied territories and relegate that kind of talk to obscure corners of the State Department. Later his aide, Alexander Haig was to signal the go ahead for the invasion of Lebanon. Indeed, the situation which prevails now, in which even a serious misdemeanor like the Pollard affair hardly causes a stir, is largely the fruition of Kissinger's doctrine of Israel's place in US foreign policy.

A careful study of Hersh's work and recent revelations on the Irangate Affair, shows that many of the personalities in the NSC and the State department are the same. Their methods of work also seem to have changed little. And when it comes to the crunch the American system is quite charitable, for the offence is not the crime but the carelessness to be caught with ones pants down.

Take the case of Nixon. Munjee lists pages full of serious crimes committed by him. Yet as Hersh says, "The pardon to Nixon embraced not only Watergate offenses but all the Nixon-Kissinger foreign policy activities, including those known at the time, such as the illegal B-52 bombing of Cambodia, and those still secret, such as the CIA operations against Salvador Allende. After years of self-imposed isolation in California, New York, and Saddle River, New Jersey, Nixon began to be active in public affairs once again in the early 1980s; he was received as a former President, Republican elder statesman, author, and expert on international relations."

It is thus difficult to share Munjee's optimism of retrieving the American Dream. It was flawed to start with, and has now degenerated beyond repair.