

Ashamed to be Arab

GHADA KARMI

It is very difficult to be an Arab in Britain today. We watch helplessly as the preparations for war on Iraq continue. There are now 27,000 British troops stationed in Kuwait and more are due to join them. The largest British destroyers the military have are deployed in the Gulf and army commanders say they are ready to fight. Britain is America's closest ally and its prime minister has provided unstinting loyalty and support for the US president's drive to war on Iraq. Tony Blair's devotion is so extreme that he risks losing his premiership and his whole political life over this enterprise.

The war he and Bush want to perpetrate will be truly awesome. According to Richard Myers, chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, it will be fought in a style not seen before. In the first 48 hours of the war, 3,000 precision-guided bombs will fall on Iraq and 500 cruise missiles, more than were used in the whole of the first Gulf War. This so-called "shock and awe" technique is designed to ensure a rapid disablement of the country's defences and morale. Vladimir Shipchenko, senior Russian military expert, anticipates that the US will first destroy all Iraq's key facilities and then wipe out its 500,000 strong army with missile and bombing raids. Nuclear weapons are also slated for possible use. Depleted uranium, which has already caused a tenfold increase in cancer amongst Iraqis, will feature, and the US president has agreed to the

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of tactical nuclear weapons as necessary.

In addition, several experimental weapons are to be tested in this war. We do not yet know what their impact will be. But, if the assault goes ahead as planned, Iraq's troops, infrastructure and economy will be annihilated within one month. The humanitarian costs are unimaginable. A joint UN and WHO report in January expected a death toll of up to 260,000 civilians initially with perhaps a million more after the collapse of Iraq's infrastructure due to starvation and disease. The UNHCR anticipates a refugee exodus of at least 600,000 externally and two million internally. This excludes long-term damage to present and future Iraqis.

Many players are trying to stop this horrific, grossly unequal war from happening. In Britain opinion polls have consistently shown a majority against the war, and parliament and government are severely split. A quarter of Labour MPs voted against the government on 26 February, the largest revolt by MPs ever, and a senior cabinet member, Claire Short, has announced she will resign if Britain

fighters without UN mandate. Two million people marched in London on 15 February, many of them drawn not from political or activist ranks, but from the heart of ordinary England. The huge Stop the War movement is currently mobilising people for a campaign of civil disobedience in the event of war.

Lest anyone in the Arab world, watching this scenario, feel encouraged to believe that the anti-war battle will be won for them by foreigners, it needs to be clear that the conflict here is not about Iraqis or Arabs. There are issues about local, inter-European and US-EU relations: the way Britain is governed, the meaning of democracy, Tony Blair's performance as prime minister; likewise, concerns about the future of the EU, given the current split, and the future of the Transatlantic alliance. It is an inter-Western debate, in which Arab wellbeing is a marginal issue.

And the Arabs have acquiesced in this marginalisation. Where they should have been the first to protest, resist and try to prevent this war they are now discounted from the debate. Western anti-war strategies do not include an Arab dimension because the Arab role is

seen as either negligible or collusive. By their compliance with American and British war preparations, the Arabs have disqualified themselves from the debate. Instead, anti-war efforts have focused on persuading Tony Blair to withdraw British support for the US, and everyone is hoping that France or Russia will come to the rescue through their veto in the Security Council.

But matters need never have come to this. Everyone can see that, without the use of Arab bases, American troops could not have mounted the ground invasion of Iraq so crucial to winning the war. If even Turkey's temporary refusal to give them similar rights has caused such problems, how much worse would they have fared without Arab help.

As it is there are some 200,000 American troops now in the Gulf with unfettered access to command and control facilities, full landing rights by sea and air and extensive logistical support. Half of Kuwait is now American occupied and closed to its own citizens. Had these facilities been denied early on the massive military build-up, which makes an American withdrawal now

inconceivable, would not have happened. This fact exposes as diplomatic froth the meetings of the Arab League and the ISCO that claimed a unified Arab rejection of aggression against Iraq. The opposition of Arab peoples, on the other hand, is not in doubt, but their protests have neither stopped nor even reduced formal Arab compliance with US military plans.

Arab reaction in Britain is no better. A community of 3-400,000 Arabs here could have mounted a vigorous anti-war effort, in concert with two million British Muslims. Though Arabs have supported anti-war protests here they have initiated none themselves. Small-scale projects like letter-writing to local MPs or forming delegations to protest to members of government have not succeeded, due to poor communal support.

How can one explain this wretched failure? How can any Arab who facilitates the unspeakable carnage planned for Iraq sleep easy at night? The Arab position is truly hard to understand or defend and, as an Arab, it fills me with shame. The tired old clichés that are used to justify this impotent stance -- Arab economic dependence on America and our helplessness against its power -- are not acceptable in the face of this overwhelming catastrophe. If small children in Palestine dare to throw stones at Israeli tanks, daily risking death, can defying US power for the rest of us be so much worse?

The writer is a Palestinian activist living in London. Her latest book, *In Search of Fatima*, is published by Verso.

PAUL KRUGMAN

Of course we'll win on the battlefield, probably with ease. I'm not a military expert, but I can do the numbers: the most recent U.S. military budget was \$400 billion, while Iraq spent only \$1.4 billion.

What frightens me is the aftermath and I'm not just talking about the problems of postwar occupation. I'm worried about what will happen beyond Iraq in the world at large, and here at home.

The members of the Bush team don't seem bothered by the enormity of what they have generated in the rest of the world. They seem to believe that other countries will change their minds once they see cheering Iraqis welcome our troops, or that our bombs will shock and awe the whole world (not just the Iraqis) or that what the world thinks doesn't matter. They're wrong on all counts.

Victory in Iraq won't end the world's distrust of the United States because the Bush administration has made it clear, over and over again, that it doesn't play by the rules. Remember: this administration told Europe to take a hike on global warming, told Russia to take a hike on missile defense, told developing countries to take a hike on trade in lifesaving pharmaceuticals, told Mexico to take a hike on immigration, mortally insulted the Turks and pulled out of the International Criminal Court all in just two years.

Nor, as we've just seen, is mili-

tary power a substitute for trust. Apparently the Bush administration thought it could bully the U.N. Security Council into going along with its plans; it learned otherwise. "What can the Americans do to us?" one African official asked. "Are they going to bomb us? Invade us?"

Meanwhile, consider this: we need \$400 billion a year of foreign investment to cover our trade deficit, or the dollar will plunge and our surging budget deficit will become much harder to finance and there are already signs that the flow of foreign investment is drying up, just when it seems that America may be about to fight a whole series of wars.

It's a matter of public record that this war with Iraq is largely the brainchild of a group of neoconservative intellectuals, who view it as a pilot project. In August a British official close to the Bush team told *Newsweek*: "Everyone wants to go to Tehran." In February 2003, according to Ha'aretz, an Israeli newspaper, Under Secretary of State John Bolton told Israeli officials that after defeating Iraq the United States would "deal with" Iran, Syria and North Korea.

Will Iraq really be the first of many? It seems all too likely and not only because the "Bush doctrine" seems to call for a series of wars. Regimes that have been targeted, or think they may be targeted, aren't likely to sit quietly and wait their turn: they're going to arm themselves to the teeth, and perhaps strike first. People who really know what they

are talking about have the heebie-jeebies over North Korea's nuclear program, and view war on the Korean peninsula as something that could happen at any moment. And at the rate things are going, it seems we will fight that war, or the war with Iran, or both at once, all by ourselves.

What scares me most, however, is the home front. Look at how this war happened. There is a case for getting tough with Iraq; bear in mind that an exasperated Clinton administration considered a bombing campaign in 1998. But it's not a case that the Bush administration ever made. Instead we got assertions about a nuclear program that turned out to be based on flawed or faked evidence; we got assertions about a link to Al Qaeda that people inside the intelligence services regard as nonsense. Yet those serial embarrassments went almost unreported by our domestic news media. So most Americans have no idea why the rest of the world doesn't trust the Bush administration's motives. And once the shooting starts, the already loud chorus that denounces any criticism as unpatriotic will become deafening.

So now the administration knows that it can make unsubstantiated claims, without paying a price when those claims prove false, and that saber rattling gains it votes and silences opposition. Maybe it will honorably refuse to act on this dangerous knowledge. But I can't help worrying that in domestic politics, as in foreign policy, this war will turn out to have been the shape of things to come.

Water no longer flows naturally

KOICHIRO MATSUURA

WATER has made a noticeable entrance in the international political arena. With this a new awareness has dawned: what if this apparently perpetual gift from the skies were yet not inexhaustible? It is also the end of symbol: what if this source of life, which is at the heart of so many rituals and hygiene practices, no longer stood for regeneration and purity? We must face the facts: water resources are growing scarce, and water quality will have an increasing cost. As for purity, it is now difficult to keep count of the regions where soiled water generates death rather than health. UNESCO, responsible for the creation of the pioneering International Hydrological Programme in the Seventies, had long anticipated this new water deal, which has been recognised by the World Summit on Sustainable Development held in Johannesburg as one of the most critical challenges facing the world today.

Whether in the Northern or the Southern hemisphere, access to clean drinking water is essential to human security and to sustainable development. It is considered more and more to be a right. However, 1.2 billion people still have no access to drinking water and 2.4 billion are deprived of water purification services. And yet, the world has enough freshwater resources to cover most needs in drinking water; but the uneven distribution of water resources shows great disparities, both social and geographical. The

In order to eliminate disparities and protect water, freshwater must be recognised on an international level as a common good and heritage. This conception, which emphasises the importance of sharing, is also a contribution to peace. For water, that increasingly vital issue, has also become a strategic one. In the world 261 river basins are divided between different States, generating a risk of "water wars".

problem, therefore, is less to do with quantity than with availability. Water quality is also a growing concern.

Water resources, given their extreme sensitivity to human activity and intensive exploitation involving highly technical engineering, are less and less natural - in a way, water no longer flows naturally. This indicates the need for a new water culture, which could combine caring, sparing and sharing. It is high time we responded to the needs of a growing population for food, health and energy by adopting a more "sober" attitude. As with any right, the right for access to water also sets obligations: the obligation for public authorities to ensure distribution, the obligation for users to prevent wastage.

Agriculture alone is responsible for two-thirds of the consumption of water drawn from natural reservoirs. To improve yields, to install drainage systems, to prevent excessive irrigation responsible for ecological disasters, these are our goals. Furthermore, global water withdrawals have increased seven-

fold, and industry-related water consumption has been multiplied by 30 in a century. Implementation of scientific research could bring considerable changes in these areas as well as others, providing information were circulated and changes of behaviour followed. Science and education are therefore conditions for these improvements, which prove more and more urgent as city needs increase - not an example of thriftiness, since wastage is estimated to represent 40% of urban consumption! This wide range of problems cannot be addressed efficiently without reinforced political willpower, strong involvement on the part of civil society, and a better form of synergy between public and private sectors.

As well as this, wastewater production has been multiplied by twenty over a century. As for diffuse pollution related to agriculture (nitrates, pesticides...), industry and urban development, they are a continual threat to water reserves. Food safety is at risk, ecosystems are being disrupted, water-related diseases cause millions of deaths each year, especially in developing countries - pollution is henceforth

regarded as a major public health concern. If we fail to react, this could jeopardize the future of these resources and with it, the quality of life, and even the survival, of future generations.

In order to eliminate disparities and protect water, freshwater must be recognized on an international level as a common good and heritage. This conception, which emphasizes the importance of sharing, is also a contribution to peace. For water, that increasingly vital issue, has also become a strategic one. In the world 261 river basins are divided between different States, generating a risk of "water wars". The international community must prevent conflict over water allocation from overcoming dialogue by providing solid legal instruments, especially in areas where water shortage is combined with political tensions.

Water has become part of the economic circuit. Given the huge investments required by waterworks, free access to water is no longer to be considered. But access to drinking water for all cannot be guaranteed without taking into

account the income and needs of users in order to adjust price scales; this new water culture is also ethical. The search for equity should preside over decision-making processes concerning great water projects. It is common, for instance, for large dams, which are often necessary to stabilise river flows or produce energy, to have a very high social and human cost: many disasters could doubtless be avoided by promoting dialogue. This, again, implies an effort towards education, information and training.

UNESCO has decided to define water as one of its main priorities over the next few years. In this International Year of Freshwater, and in anticipation of the Third World Water Forum due to take place in Kyoto, the *Twentieth-Century Talks* recently organised by Jérôme Bindé at UNESCO, in addressing the question "The Future of Water", provided an occasion to lay out guidelines for thought and action. In this area our competences are an asset; besides providing support for forward-looking studies in the area of water, for research in hydrology and for innovation, the Organization can federate on the international level the commitment towards education which is vital to the process of sustainable development. If we delay in setting up a real sense of ecocitizenship, by fostering thrift and public-spiritedness for one thing, the day may come when the Earth can no longer be dubbed a "Blue Planet".

The writer is the Director-General of UNESCO.

Bangladesh at Third World Water Forum

MD. SAEDUR RAHMAN

WATER is essential to all ecosystems and all human activities. The earth contains approximately 1.4 billion cubic kilometres of water, but approximately 97.5 percent of the amount is brackish water. About three-quarters of the remaining 2.5 percent is locked up in icecaps and glaciers, leaving humans only a fraction of percentage point of the total water on earth available for use.

The poverty of a large percentage of the world population is both a symptom and a cause of water crisis. Global water concern is as old as history. Agreements for sharing water systems go back as far as the 16th century, with European treaties on the shared use of navigational facilities in river channels. But initial pacts like those on the Rhine in 1868 were mainly single-purpose arrangements. The United Nations Water Conference held in Mar del Plata, Argentina, in 1977 was the first and only inter-governmental conference devoted exclusively to water. The Dublin conference on Water and the Environment: Development Issues of the 21st century, in January 1992 set four guiding principles that have deeply influenced international water policy. These principles are: Fresh water is a finite and vulnerable resource, essential to sustain life, development and the environment; water development and management should be based on a participatory approach involving users, planners and policy-makers at all levels; women play a central role in providing managing and safeguarding water; and water has an economic value in all its competing uses and should be recognized as an economic good.

Fifteen years after the Mar del Plata Conference, the UN held its Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) at Rio de Janeiro in June 1992. Commonly known as the "Earth Summit," the Rio Conference, which covered a broad spectrum of environmental topics, prescribed an ambitious action plan, known as Agenda 21, that included seven programme areas related to water resources. Agenda 21 called for integrated

management of water resources with catchments or sub-basins as the unit of management, allowing for differing approaches reflecting the unique needs of each basin organization. Also, to equalise differences in the financial status of the participants, it was recognised that external financial bodies would have to get involved. Chapter 18 of Agenda 21 recognised the need for a unifying force in the management of the world's water resources. "The fragmentation of responsibilities for water resources development among sectoral agencies is proving to be an even greater impediment to promotion of integrated water management than had been anticipated," the document says. Effective implementation and coordination mechanisms are required. The assessment was that, globally, the water sector had to move from a scientific and technological deliberative phase to a comprehensive managerial phase. It was hoped the UNCED Earth Summit would revive the spirit of the Mar del Plata Conference and put water firmly on the international political agenda. However, issues like climate change, biodiversity, deforestation and ozone depletion tended to take centre stage in Rio. Nonetheless, the Earth Summit seemed to mark a turning point in modern thinking. A central principle of Agenda 21 is that the lives of people and the environment are profoundly inter-linked. Since the Rio Earth Summit there has been a greater appreciation of the fundamental importance of taking integrated approaches.

In June 1996, the World Water Council was established in Marseille, France as the International Water Policy Think Tank. At the first World Water Forum, organised together with the government of Morocco in March 1999, the Marrakech Declaration describes how the Council aims to develop the Vision as "Building on past international efforts and relying on the collective wisdom and resources of the global community, the process leading to the Vision will include research, consultations, workshops, print and electronic publication and many other means for absorbing, synthesising and disseminating knowledge.

At the conclusion of this process, fully aware of the pitfalls along the way, the Vision will offer policy relevant and region and country-specific conclusions and recommendations for action to be taken by the world's leaders to meet the needs of future generations."

The follow-up in March 2000 in The Netherlands, the Hague Declaration at the Second World Water Forum to achieve water security defined the challenges as Meeting basic needs, Securing the food supply, Protecting ecosystems, Sharing water resources, Managing risks, Valuing water and Governing water wisely.

WSSD August/September 2002, Johannesburg: the plan of implementation; article 25 recommends "developing integrated water resources management and water efficiency plans by 2005, to support developing countries, through actions at all levels".

Water resources management and benefit sharing

Water resources management in Bangladesh, as the lower riparian country, is closely interlinked with and largely dependent on 57 transboundary rivers having shared basins with the neighbouring countries. The non-navigational treaties between Bangladesh and neighbouring countries for international water courses over the last 50 years remain an unresolved issue for lack of water allocation, poor water quality provision, lack of monitoring/enforcement/conflict resolution mechanisms and failure to include all riparian states. In an attempt to bypass the past failures, the "water sharing" is being re-articulated as "benefit sharing" that shall benefit the comparatively privileged states. Inter-linking rivers for water transfer by the upper riparian state may threaten even the very existence of a lower riparian state like Bangladesh. Bangladesh may call upon the United Nations to closely monitor the water sharing for better management of this scarce resource.

Safe drinking water and sanitation

While the global programme is to halve, by the year 2015, the propor-

tion of people without access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation, Bangladesh is facing an acute crisis of arsenic contamination of the ground water across the country over 50% of its total area. The wide-spread arsenic contamination in ground water has dwarfed the commendable success that Bangladesh made during the last decades. It has rather lowered the safe drinking water coverage to only 74 percent from 95 percent of the population. Twenty nine million people thus have no access to safe drinking water. Lack of proper sanitation and drainage facilities, inadequate water supply, and insufficient health and hygienic education are the primary causes of water related diseases.

Water for food & rural development

In Bangladesh, agriculture is the principal driving force of the rural economy, often the whole economy. About 20% of the national GDP is generated by agriculture which employs some 60% of the labour force. The poor section of the people needs to participate more directly in the growth process rather than having to rely on a trickle down effect. The factors critically important for Bangladesh are access to land, financial services and natural resources especially water. Growth of agriculture for food and rural development is crucial to sustainable poverty reduction.

Water pollution prevention and ecosystem conservation

Wastewater from the three major water use categories agriculture, industry, and domestic use contributes to water pollution in Bangladesh. Agricultural fertilisers and pesticides, industrial effluents, and household wastewater are often discharged with minimal treatment into surface water, and sometimes leak into underground aquifers. Use of water upstream, which is closely related to population dynamics and economic development affects the downstream. In the Ganges River Basin, deforestation and water extractions in the upstream country have reduced river flows and caused dry-season water shortages, salinity, and fish-

ery depletion in Bangladesh. People living in the Ganges delta have been adversely affected by such changes. Conservation of ecosystem has thus gone beyond the confines of the state.

Bangladesh has adopted its national policy on water pollution prevention and ecosystem conservation. The need for international support and regional co-operation is foreseen as a condition to implement various regulatory and non-regulatory measures. Bangladesh may therefore urge upon the global leaders for joint management of water pollution and ecosystem conservation based on regional efforts.

Disaster mitigation and risk management

Physical hazards that cause considerable loss of life and catastrophic physical damage and disruption to society and the national economy include exceptionally widespread riverine flooding, severe tropical cyclones and associated coastal storm surges, droughts and earthquakes. In addition, rapid on-set flash flooding, tornadoes and riverbank erosion are frequent causes of more localised, but nevertheless intense human suffering and losses. Because of Bangladesh's large densely settled population, low income and widespread poverty, the impacts of disasters have been the focus of international attention and a substantial body of investigations from environmental, social and wider economic perspectives. Major disasters have had massive human and social impacts: the estimates are that 139,000 people were killed during the 1991 cyclone, whilst 31 million were directly affected by the 1998 floods. These extreme events also have clearly demonstrable negative impacts on the Bangladesh economy. The complexity of the physical environment and concern about the changing risks resulting from climatic change and human intervention in Bangladesh and neighbouring states justify continued investigation into the hazards and improved risk assessment.

The author is Project Director, Chief Engineer, Coastal Embankment Rehabilitation Project, Bangladesh Water Development Board.