

The cost of a futile war too high to pay

We want immediate cease-fire in Iraq

THE US-led war in Iraq launched with the much-touted promise of being 'bitter and brief' seems stuck in quicksand. Already into its eighth day, it shows no sign of abating with growing uncertainties stalking its future course. It looks set to escalate and become more complicated with each passing day.

The US has opened a new front in northern Iraq apparently to play the referee between the Kurds and the Turks; but principally it is a self-confidence building measure on the part of Pentagon. On the back of the reverses the allied troops have faced in the southern parts of Iraq, they felt the need for a link-up with the friendly Kurdish north. One would therefore assume that the US military presence in the Kurd-dominated area is aimed to connect down with the mainstream allied forces converging on Baghdad from the vast Iraqi terrain to the south. Things have not 'gone to planning' in the southern cities of Iraq; it has not been a cake-walk for the allied troops through Umm Qasr, Basra, Nasiriyah, Najaf and Karbala. Fedayeen conscripts, the paramilitary defence force offered stiff guerilla resistance as the elite Republican Army and Special Republican Army stood ready in Baghdad for the final showdown.

Strategically, the war is becoming a costly venture for the US and UK. Longer their supply-line of armoured convoys, greater has been its exposure to guerilla sniper, even rocket launcher attacks. In fact, frequent snapping of the supply-line slowing down the pace of their operations, the allied generals have had to change their original strategy. They are not by-passing the cities and townships on the way to Baghdad anymore, but are treating each one of them as 'military target'.

Another important factor that has come hugely to Iraq's favour and is consequently working against US-British interests, is the season of sandstorm that is in full fury in the deserts and river-banks of Iraq. Little wonder, military strategists of George Bush and Tony Blair had been growing impatient with the majority UNSC members' insistence that more time be given to Hans Blix's mission to complete the UN inspection of suspected WMD sites in Iraq. One would recall, the Western allies' criticism of the UN proceedings at that time was pejorative, reflecting a worry over the approaching sandstorms. The apprehension has proved right.

The blinding sandstorms with visibility down to a few yards ruled out laser-guided air strike thereby upsetting allied contingency war plans. The objective conditions have combined in such a way that the war in Iraq may continue much longer than the one-and-a-half-month invasion of Afghanistan. Being veterans from the mistakes of the first Gulf war and with a proven stamina of the eight-year-long Iraq-Iran war, the Iraqi soldiers are handling the present war with great intrepidity. This time they are fighting for their life and the honour of their motherland. Certainly they are not throwing in the towel in the face of an overwhelming US military show.

In the process, each fierce battle of resistance from Fedayeen guerillas and Republican elements, the lists of US and British casualties are growing. That is the cost being entailed by the belligerents; and imagine the toll being exacted from the victim country. The mounting civilian casualties counted in terms of the dead and maimed Iraqis from under the rubbles and in the hospitals of a country that is being rapidly ravaged into a wasteland is a stupendous indictment on the criminality of war effort into the new millennium.

The correspondents of Western media in Baghdad have discerned a certain sincere, bold and forthright expression of anger against the US by Iraqis completely uncovered by the gun-brandishing marines and the deafening aerial bombardments all around. On another level, from what were anti-war protests throughout the world the other day, we now see Anti-Americanism growing and in unexpected places, too. For instance, in the marketplace from Germany to Ecuador boycott of American goods is gaining ground. In Germany, Middle Eastern-made *Meccacola* is replacing Coca-Cola and the importers in that country may have de-listed 27 American products including machinery spare-parts.

How heavy a cost the war is exacting has to be measured in terms of the divisions and breaches it has created in the UN, EU and NATO, let alone driving wedges between the governments and the peoples in various countries.

According to the readings of international business study antennas, the growth rate of the world economy will decline by 2.1 per cent if the war continues beyond six weeks.

On this bleak note, the whole world naturally looks for an assertive UN role to bail us all out, Bush and Blair included, from the catastrophic repercussions of a prolonged war in the Gulf. Let there be a serious UNSC initiative calling for an immediate cease-fire in Iraq and disengagement of forces before the question of Baghdad's compliance with resolution 1441 is dealt with in a new perspective.

Making of legends



HASNAT ABDUL HYE

WAR does strange things to people and places, stranger than what would be thought as possible. It makes cowards of heroes and heroes villains. Evil redeems itself wearing the 'red badge of courage'. The righteous lose their moral high ground in a morass of deceit and cruelty. Places far away from the conflagration reverberate to the sound of death and destruction. People of all shades and faith unite across the seven seas, in anguish and indignation. Tables are turned against the powerful by emotions unleashed by the ordinary. Victors hang their heads in shame and guilt. The vanquished are immortalized, blessed with glory.

Wars make history, but they also create legends. Some of the legends pass into myths. It is the latter, legends and myths, that become part of life, relived time and again, by ordinary people, in moments of joy and sorrow. They nourish the soul and inspire the minds. When legends are about good and evil, about right and wrong, they belong to the whole of mankind.

The war in Iraq unleashed by the blatant act of aggression in violation of international law and the UN charter has already spawned legends and some more are in the making. Even before the war started America, the erstwhile champion of democracy, justice and fair play, came to be seen in its true colours as a war monger. It went to the UN, not in respect for it or for international law, but to buy

time. It went ahead with military build up in the Gulf about the same time as UN inspection in Iraq was continuing. There was little doubt about its covert plan but the world community hoped that sanity would prevail and recklessness would be held in check. But all arguments and persuasions fell on deaf ears, so obsessed was it with vengeful self-interest. For a while, it cajoled and coerced allies to give the stamp of approval. Having failed to gain support in the Security Council it went to war without the fig leaf of a resolution. It was

inspection should have been allowed to continue. If possession of weapons of mass destruction was the reason for the "punitive action", the UN inspection reports did not substantiate that. If the liberation of Iraq was such an overriding objective, the Palestinians had a priority claim to be liberated from Israeli occupation. More importantly, under what authority America has embarked on the liberation of Iraq? Some Iraqis may have suffered from lack of freedom and other constraints, but where is the cheer and jubila-

the criminal Jesse James, Rumsfeld with the murderer Billy the kid, Condoleezza with Bonnie and Powell with Butch Cassidy, the gun slinger. Like these outlaws their modern day successors will be forever haunted by fear and unrest. Their names will evoke hatred, nausea and abomination in the minds of peace loving people. Such will be the legend wrought by the Iraq war of America.

The French President Jacques Chirac, his Foreign Minister Dominique Villepin, the Russian Foreign Minister Ivanov and the

world cannot be subjected to the dictate of one superpower and they will not tolerate a country to become the sole arbiter in world affairs. This fantastic turning point in international relations at the dawn of the new millennium that shatter the illusion of America that it is going to be their century. As the catalyst for this sea change in international geo-politics, Iraq war will be remembered again and again by posterity. These changes in international politics, too, are legendary in scope and nature.

Ordinary men and women in the

coming out of the war in Iraq.

The most significant legend made by the war is the transformation of Saddam Hussain and his associates. Criticized and condemned by America and many other countries as a ruthless dictator and feared by many Iraqis, Saddam has emerged as a hero, as the underdog who has refused to be bullied and cowed down. Contrary to America's hope and propaganda, there has been no civil uprising or military revolt. On the contrary, the war has united the Iraqis (except the Kurds in the north and the Shiites in the south who have been bribed and protected by America under the self declared no fly zone) and they look upon the attack as aggression against their motherland. Out-gunned and out manned, the Iraqi regime and the people show no signs of nervousness and fear. This is the most surprising aspect of the war. To-day, for his bravery, self-respect and determination to fight to death Saddam has become a hero to Iraqis, Arabs and the peace loving people of the world who are against war and aggression. Even if he lays down his life he will remain a legend, inspiring freedom loving people all over the world.

The legends of Iraq war will not be complete without the story of the bearded old farmer who shot down a high-tech Apache helicopter with a vintage rifle. When war is imposed upon a people unjustly it throws up heroes from the most unexpected places. It is a measure of patriotism and deep hatred against aggressors that an ordinary farmer should find himself in the front line. This is the real stuff of legend.

The war has just begun. Already there are legends galore. There is no doubt that many more are in the making. One thing is certain: the legends of this war will never cease to "shock and awe" the Americans.

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IN MY VIEW

The legends of Iraq war will not be complete without the story of the bearded old farmer who shot down a high-tech Apache helicopter with a vintage rifle. When war is imposed upon a people unjustly it throws up heroes from the most unexpected places. It is a measure of patriotism and deep hatred against aggressors that an ordinary farmer should find himself in the front line. This is the real stuff of legend.

appropriate because naked aggression has to be in a naked manner! The UN was left by the wayside to nurse its wounded feelings and the world was told by President Bush to face 'the moment of truth'. When both the majority of the Security Council members and Iraq called his bluff, it was America that faced the moment of truth, the fact that it was almost isolated and alone on the road to war. Even in the era of the cold war, no big power was so bitingly humiliated and roundly condemned. For pursuing a policy that is manifestly wrong, immoral and illegal America now clearly joins the rogue's gallery in history. It is a distinction for which her founding fathers may be turning in their graves.

All the pretexes given by America for the war, disarming Iraq, liberating the Iraqi people and making world safe from terrorism sound hollow because of the facts and circumstances. If disarming Iraq was the prime objective, the UN

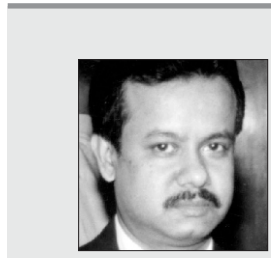
tion among them to prove that they would like to trade the present regime with an occupation force? As regards terrorism, the view that Iraq war will aggravate the problem and not mitigate it, is widely held. This is because terrorism will beget terrorism. Even America knows that the pretexes for war are flimsy and ludicrous. These don't succeed at all to hide the real intention: the occupation of Iraq by force to establish America's stranglehold in the middle east and to control Iraq's oil. It is a classic motivation and strategy of imperialists.

For this act of wanton aggression America will forever live with the stigma of an aggressor. For masterminding this war of self-aggrandizement America's leaders will be considered as renegade criminals bent on committing crimes against humanity. Harking back to the days of wild west (favourite of Dubya!) where outlaws prowled and played fugitive, President Bush will be compared with

German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder, have also become legend in their life time for standing up against boorish and arrogant America. Until this happened it was unthinkable that these erstwhile allies of America would be disagreeing with her policy so strongly and give vent to their feelings so vehemently. The unequivocal and unwavering stand of these countries can only be explained by their strong commitment to international law and maintain world peace. In the angry war of words with America, France has emerged as the most outspoken, morally righteous and diplomatically the most suave country in the world to-day. Through the Iraq crisis France has demonstrated the potentials of giving leadership to the overwhelming majority of the world community and their countries opposing the new threat of American imperialism and self-aggrandizement. The role of countries like France, Germany and Russia give hope that the

street also make history. They, too, give birth to legends to be remembered. Millions of people demonstrating against war in America, England, France, Germany, Asia, Australia, in the Middle East, in short all over the world, took to the streets more than once (and this is continuing) because of their commitment for world peace and the conviction that the war against Iraq is unjust. The demonstrators belong to different races, religion and political faith but the glaring injustice of the war has united and brought them together to oppose America. In a sense, they carry the legacy of the men and women who took to the barricades during the French Revolution upholding the sovereignty of people. These demonstrators, sharing the same cause, and demonstrating in the same manner, have also created a new concept of sovereignty, that of the world community which is as inviolable as a country's sovereignty. This development, too, will be looked upon as another legend

The American imperium in Iraq



MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

THE day after the U.S. strike began in Iraq, Leon Fuerth, who was the national security adviser to former U.S. vice president Al Gore, claimed that the United States was putting on the air of an empire. He wrote in *The Washington Post* that the word "empire", so far used as a metaphor to convey the global scope of American interests and of American military, economic and political influence, would become a concrete reality after the conquest of Iraq.

Short of a miracle, the conquest of Iraq looks like a concrete reality that is going to happen. As soon as the sandstorms subside in the Iraqi deserts and the pockets of resistance by Saddam's forces are shellacked one by one, Iraq will fall into the American hand. But America is putting a benevolent air within its air of empire. It is claiming that its conquest of Iraq is aimed to bring about a regime change, which will ensure the freedom of the Iraqi people.

That is like adding injury to the insult, and Perry Anderson challenged it long before the war. In his essay *Force and Consent*, which appeared in September/October 2002 issue of the *New Left Review*, he said that America's intentions in Iraq were far from altruistic. Instead, the occupation of Iraq would give Washington a large oil-

rich platform in the centre of the Arab world on which to build an enlarged version of Afghan-style democracy designed to change the whole political landscape of the Middle East.

Perry further claimed that none of the reasons given to justify the occupation of Iraq was more than eyewash. The stockpile of weapons accumulated by Iraq would be far greater than the weapons of mass destruction possessed by Iraq. Iraq's occupation of Kuwait "was an afterthought to the record of the

glehold of a dictator? If that is true then Saddam Hussein has played the role of a straight man in a joke of which George Bush has said the punchline.

It is easier to deal with the political aspect of America's war with Iraq. Saddam Hussein is finally getting the lumps for his big mouth. He dared a superpower without having the means to defend his country. Even if we ignore the images sent through night scope cameras and videophones sent by reporters,

the first casualty in any war, and that America isn't telling the truth. According to Charles Glass, who wrote an essay titled *The First Lies Club* in the *Reviews Magazine*, the American penchant for telling lies goes back in time. In August 1964, the Gulf of Tonkin crisis developed when the U.S. Secretary of Defence Robert McNamara said that North Vietnam had fired on USS Maddox. The truth came after much bloodshed that USS Maddox was actually supporting illegal attacks on North Vietnam.

the 114-day Spanish-American War. When the US President William McKinley celebrated with a roomful of America's richest and most powerful men at a Boston banquet following the Treaty of Paris with Spain, he swore that "no imperial designs lurk in the American mind." Right after that the United States went ahead with the conquest of Cuba, and then Puerto Rico, Guam and the Philippines, annexation of Hawaii and the occupation of the Wake Island 2,000 miles further west.

By the time American forces withdrew in 1901, American businesses controlled 80 per cent of Cuba's mineral exports.

It turned out after a modern forensic analysis done by Admiral Hyman Rickover in 1976 that the explosion of Maine was merely a *casus belli* that America needed to push its imperialist claws. The most likely cause of the explosion was spontaneous combustion of coal stored next to the powder for Maine's gun, and the Spanish navy had actually tried to save the American sailors after the explosion.

The preamble to the Declaration of Independence says that America shall never govern without the consent of the governed. If America is fighting a war in Iraq, the truth is that it is fighting that war without the consent of the Iraqi people, and if it sets up a government in Iraq, it will be done without the consent of the Iraqi people. There are views that if America reconstructs Iraq after the conquest, the end of sanctions and full resumption of oil exports, under a US occupation might improve the living standards. Iraqi people might enjoy the respite and democracy under a new administration, creating the potential for a stable American protectorate in future.

Even if all of that happens, the words of Edmund Burke will still be ringing in the conscience of the world. "Magnanimity in politics is not seldom the truest wisdom; and a great empire and little minds go ill together." Never mind America wants to build an empire. It can fight and win all the wars it wants. But this one time it should have been patient until a UN resolution backed its action or the Iraqi people thwarted their own dictator. Because the air of empire looks so obvious.

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CROSS TALK

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West Bank". Its murder of its own citizens (there is a contesting theory that Iran, not Iraq, had used mustard gas against the Kurds) was far surpassed by the dictatorship in Indonesia, which was welcomed by Washington when it happened.

On top that, the UN weapons inspectors Hans Blix and El Baradei said that Baghdad was now taking "pro-active" steps to cooperate with their requests and both agreed that they needed more time to disarm Iraq. El Baradei even disputed the veracity of Western intelligence reports that Iraq had purchased uranium from Niger.

Yet America had to go to war with Iraq to "decapitate" a regime that was evil. And just think about the cost of the war in financial terms (exceeding US\$ 80 billion), human lives and America's image in the rest of the world. Is America risking so much so that the people of Iraq can be free from the stran-

embedded with advancing troops, as western propaganda, people wonder what he threatened the United States with if he couldn't even fly a single warplane since his country came under attack?

But the moral aspect of it is hard to swallow. The attack on Iraq isn't for the same reason the United States once went to Kuwait and Japan to liberate their people. And if the United States wants to justify this war on Saddam in the name of Iraqi people, one can justify criticism of that decision in their name as well. Dictators are like relatives; one doesn't have the choice to pick them. And who has authorized the United States to get rid of Saddam? The people of Iraq? The global community? The UN?

The answer is that nothing but its own resolve has engaged America in the war against Iraq. Why does it need an excuse to justify it? After all, everybody knows truth is

Before that, Theodore Roosevelt became president of the United States and began work on a canal through the Isthmus of Panama. When Colombia, of which the Isthmus was a part, hesitated to provide access to the United States, a local revolution declared an independent Panama. Washington recognised it within hours, and the US Navy prevented Colombian troops from reasserting their authority. The United States then bought the canal from a private company. Roosevelt, who called the canal his "most important action" in foreign affairs, wrote, "I did not lift a finger to incite the revolutionists." Charles Glass wrote that Roosevelt had lied.

But the earliest and the most classic example of American aggression in the garb of assured innocence started with the sinking of US battleship *Maine* in Havana, Cuba in 1898. The United States blamed it on Spain, which led to

Thus the US promise to liberate Spanish colonies ended up in merely substituting the Spanish oppression with its own. As in the American West, so in Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Philippines, the United States used brute force to consolidate its conquests. Like the Spanish army forced villagers into concentration camps in Cuba, the United States corralled Filipinos, whom the American soldiers called "savages" and "niggers", into similar camps and sixty years later, under the name of "strategic hamlets", did the same to the Vietnamese.

And what came out of the American intention to liberate Cuba? The American businesses soon invested US\$30 million in the island. New York corporations assumed control of tramways and ferries. The United Fruit Company, later to become notorious in Guatemala, bought almost two million Cuban acres at twenty cents each.

Information control, freedom of press and American policy

KHADEMUL ISLAM

THE Americans have defended their invasion of Iraq with slogans about democracy and freedom. But what they are doing is actually the reverse, are instead undermining the foundations of democracy, human rights and freedom of the individual in the fragile democracies of the Third World, in the regions where autocratic rule and personalization of the state constantly threaten freedom of thought, fundamental human rights, the right of the judiciary and the press to be independent of government control.

The Daily Star on March 21 carried a news item that "the government had imposed restrictions on state-controlled media, and asked it to 'carefully handle' news regarding the war in Iraq. The foreign ministry has asked the authorities of Bangladesh Betar, Bangladesh Television and BBS news agency not to highlight statements in favour of Iraq and

demonstrations against the U.S.' They have also been advised to broadcast, telecast or transmit pro-Iraq news items 'very mildly' and, if necessary, discuss with higher authorities before delivery.

The government has denied it. We have reasons to believe otherwise.

Why would the government issue such orders? And why, all of a sudden, is the government-controlled media's coverage of the war lacklustre?

Because the Americans want it so. The report further said "the restrictions came following repeated requests from the US embassy in Dhaka. The US ambassador met the foreign minister, foreign secretary and other relevant quarters in the government and requested them not to instigate public demonstrations against the USA."

Again, the concerned government officials have denied all this.

But doubts among us persist. And with good reason. The Ameri-

American policy of wanting to control and manipulate information means that every Third World politico surviving by unfair means, every repressive government from Damascus to Djibouti, will feel more comfortable reining in dissent to its rule.

cans, who are so adroit with their slogans ('Operation Free Iraq), who are justifying the bombing of Baghdad by reassuring us they are doing it for the good of its inhabitants, have been attempting to control both their own and foreign media in the recent past. A press that taken as a whole, along with the upper courts, are our only institutions that fight, even if sporadically, the good fight for the rights of citizens, for the public cause. Our democracy is very young, with shallow roots, under siege from all sides, and in this bleak political landscape it is, on these two institutions, a free, combative press and an independent

judiciary, that our nation's future rests.

Ever since the Bush regime declared war on Osama Bin Laden, it has been aware that the conflict is as much a media as a military one. It began with its own media. In 2001 there were strong rumours that national security advisor Condoleezza Rice influenced American television networks to reduce airtime given to Bin Laden speeches. Later, the US State Department, which has a seat on the board of the Congress-financed Voice of America, tried to ban an interview on VoA with the spiritual leader of the Taliban, Mullah Mohammed Omar. Over

150 American journalists protested, and the interview went ahead. But did not air. And then American attention shifted abroad, particularly to Al-Jazeera, the Arab TV station based in Qatar which for the first time was giving Arabs a taste of what a free, articulate, independent news media was capable of. It had angered the Americans by its live coverage of the Palestinian *intifada*. So on a visit in October 2001, in the most brazen attempt at information control, Secretary of State Collin Powell asked the Emir of Qatar to bring Al-Jazeera to heel and "stop encouraging anti-American feelings." But more significantly for

Arabs, by initiating freewheeling discussions on topics previously considered taboo, Al-Jazeera opened up and widened the scope of public discourse. I say all this just to underline the fact that what Colin Powell -- the secretary of state of a country constantly portraying itself as the champion of press freedom -- was demanding was to muzzle the only free news media the Arab world has ever had, the one TV station that covers international events in Arabic and challenges the conventional Western international media on its own turf, and even right now is giving coverage of the American assault on Iraq that is far more neutral than

the flag-waving jingoism of CNN and BBC.

Collin Powell's request (which was denied by the Emir in a rare act of Arab courage) brought protests from Reporters Sans Frontieres, whose general secretary Robert Menard said the US was "joining the many authoritarian regimes in the Middle East who have little respect for freedom of press," that "information pluralism must be respected in all circumstances."

The conclusion to be drawn is that this American policy of wanting to control and manipulate information means that every Third World politico surviving by unfair means, every repressive government from Damascus to Djibouti, will feel more comfortable reining in dissent to its rule. "Ah," they will smirk to each other, "don't worry, we'll say the Americans wanted it, or there'd be bad consequences." And so while the Americans think they are simply doing spin control, think that it is just another modern-day political

game, and while their own press is strong enough to resist such regulation, in the more unstable 'democracies' where freedom of the media is dependent on the tender mercies of whichever political party happens to be in power, this policy can have disastrous consequences.

A postscript: During the American bombing of Kabul in November of 2001 Al-Jazeera angered the Americans with its coverage of the mayhem. Then, just a couple of hours before the Northern Alliance took over Kabul, two supposedly 'smart' bombs hit its office and gutted it. Questioned about it, the Pentagon, which makes it a point to say that it pinpoints targets in the cities it bombs, replied that it didn't know that Al-Jazeera had an office in Kabul.

Readers can draw their own conclusions.

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