

Camp David meet

Bush and Blair fail to agree on UN role

President George W Bush and Prime Minister Tony Blair again expressed their firm resolve, during the meeting at Camp David, that war on Iraq will continue until Saddam Hussein's regime is finished - protests though are mounting all over the world against the military operations, a direct attack on Iraq's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

The two war allies, however, could not say when the hostilities would finally be over, deviating from their earlier position that the war would be brief, one-sided with overwhelming display of great military might. That has indeed been the case so far except the miscalculations, now admitted by the coalition war strategists, about the nature and intensity of Iraqi resistance. It seems much of the terrific force of the missiles and bombs has been spent on innocent civilians.

The latest developments on the fronts do suggest that the revised assessment of the situation could be closer to the truth. And therein lies the danger -- the humanitarian crisis in Iraqi cities and towns will deepen if the war is prolonged.

It has been reported that the US is not showing much enthusiasm about having the UN 'on board' during the post-war reconstruction of the country -- a point raised by Tony Blair during his talks with the US president.

The British prime minister is absolutely right in seeking a UN role in Iraq after the war is over. But what he has sidetracked is that the UN should also have a role in conflict resolution -- effecting an early cease-fire in this particular instance. If Blair now wants the UN to be involved in post-war reconstruction -- leaving it out of the military operations against a sovereign country -- the real intent behind his move might come under international scrutiny. It sounds like an attempt to bring the UN in to give a politically and morally unjustifiable war a degree of legitimacy.

Tony Blair has also talked about resuming the food-for-oil programme, with the UN as the main coordinating body, as a possible way of averting the impending humanitarian crisis in Iraq. Here he is dealing with the effect not the cause -- the war has brought all humanitarian activities to a halt in Iraq. So it has to be stopped to get everything else going.

Nothing can help the people of Iraq as long as they come under missile and bomb attacks. President Bush and Prime Minister Tony Blair should immediately respond to the global demand by withdrawing the troops sent on a mass murder mission.

Delay in wheat procurement

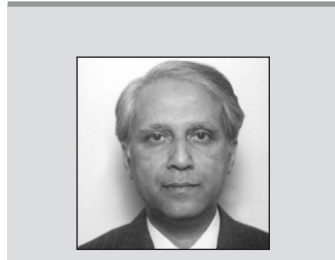
Authorities should pull up their socks

We are quite anxious about the slow progress in wheat procurement drive this season. In addition to that, according to reports, only 20 thousand tonnes of Aman were procured in the last season against the target of two lakh tonnes. And as always, both the authorities and the growers are putting the blame on each other for the slow drive. But the fact remains that wheat procurement has not made the expected progress it should have. Though the agriculture minister was honest enough to admit his ministry's fault, but whether he made enough efforts to assign his officials to procure grains at the beginning of the season remains doubtful.

Wheat growers in the northern region have said that like every year, the officials would rush to meet the target when the season is about to end. And invariably they would fail to achieve their goal. As it is, food aid has dried up mainly because US have diverted previously committed food aid to drought-prone Africa. And now with the war in Iraq, the risk of aid drying up has grown even larger. In such circumstances, we cannot let the foreign currency reserve drop by using it to buy food from abroad. Because the reserve would become extremely useful to buy another most necessary item, oil.

Therefore it is of utmost importance to procure wheat as well as boro seed -- whatever could be scrounged at such a late stage of the season. May be it would be difficult to procure a lot, because seedlings may have been destroyed. But taking the present situation into consideration, we hope the authorities would be serious to speed up the procurement process. Thanks to a wide-spread scandal last year involving ruling party MPs and officials, the government had already reduced the internal wheat procurement target by one lakh ton than last year. Undoubtedly it would be quite shameful if the authorities fail to achieve even that target now.

The war is 'going according to plan'



MUHAMMAD ZAMIR

LIKE many others, I have also been following developments in Iraq. Arm chair pundits, analysts and so-called specialists on Middle-Eastern affairs are having a field day. On-site journalists, thanks to the concept of being 'embedded' with 'coalition' units are providing television viewers with their commentaries based on inside information.

Gulf War II is however not turning out to be the sequel of Gulf War I as had been expected by the Coalition of the Willing. Lack of enthusiasm in receiving the Coalition soldiers as liberators is proving to be a nightmare for the public relations spin-men in Coalition tinsel towns. Cynicism is creeping in along with realism as days grind on in a war wanted by few but opposed by most.

The Iraqi regime will in all probability be replaced after many anxious days in the House of Commons and the Congress. However, right now, optimism is not the buzz word among western stock markets. Most are worried because the risk factor appears to be moving up the ladder as days turn into a week and more. Investors are reconsidering the length and cost of the war. The hype of 'rapid progress' is being thwarted by reports of dangerous 'pockets of resistance'. Vulnerability seems to be running inversely proportional to movement forward. One is being reminded of the old saying that if you leave too many hornet's nests around, you might be stung.

We are being continuously informed by officials spokespersons from different armed forces of the Coalition that "it is all going according to plan,"

barring of course, minor changes. It is being pointed out that essentially the plan is still the same.

Like any other professional, (involved with practical aspects of international politics for more than thirty-five years) I am slightly suspicious of pre-arranged plans. It reminds me of the story I heard in Cairo in January 1971 about the 1967 war between Egypt and Israel. As Egyptian troops continued to retreat, their Soviet minders kept on reminding them that Israel was

spokespersons have stated that their forces are closing in, but Saddam has counter-claimed that the 'enemy' is being dragged into a 'quagmire'. There have been many reports that full control has not been achieved inside cities and towns. News of 'uprisings' are followed very soon afterwards with emergence of heavy armour and hundreds of pro-Saddam elements. Fierce battles have led to 'several casualties' on the part of the coalition forces and many more for the Iraqi armed detachments.

smart bombs and missiles. Intense aerial bombing has not been the great catalyst that it was spelt out to be. The implosion has not come about. It is now also being suggested that fanatical, desperate pro-Saddam armed personnel are restricting open show of support for the Coalition forces. If that is the reason, then the planners in the Coalition forces should have thought about it. Saddam seems to have second-guessed them. In the meantime, as their prognosis goes

current war is but just a few days old. They are saying that Gulf War I had lasted 46 days -- 38 days of intense bombing and eight days of advance. One would presume from their argument that the current conflict is characterised differently and that the Coalition is holding back on their punches. It is also being suggested that care is being taken not to disrupt the public infrastructure in important cities like Baghdad, Najaf or Karbala. Apparently, such measures would facilitate a quicker rehabilitation of

It is not proving to be an easy war. Early combat deaths and the sight of captured Coalition forces personnel paraded on television have provided a first test of US Public opinion, and the resolve of an administration which has waded its credibility on war. As AFP has put it, "tears of the bereaved and the sight of yellow ribbons around trees in support of prisoners of war in an echo of the Vietnam era are easy fodder for a ravenous 24 hour news coverage following a war, unfolding in real time in every living room." Differences in connotation between the word 'secure' and 'safe' are being endlessly debated.

As days have gone by, one has watched the reactions from various quarters. Russian and French Presidents, the Arab League and many Non-Aligned States have reiterated the need for the United Nations. President Bush and Prime Minister Blair have met again a few days ago. The alliance between Blair and Bush, forged in troubled times, are beginning to exhibit a faint hint of fractured lines over the future of administering Iraq and the involvement of the United Nations in this scenario.

Downing Street is probably being more practical given the open expressions of concern by the UN Secretary General. Damage limitation exercises by the British establishment have also led their Foreign Secretary to pointing out to the BBC that "it is hypocritical for the West to demand Iraqi compliance with UN Security Council resolutions while appearing to be rather quixotic over resolutions concerning the Israeli-Palestinian conflict."

It may be all going according to plan for the Coalition planners but the Coalition needs to remember that victory in the battlefield always needs victory in the political arena afterwards. International law is important for bolstering collective security and also for public opinion. This is what is being reiterated on the streets of Europe and in many countries all over the world.

Muhammad Zamir is a former Secretary and Ambassador.

POST BREAKFAST

As days have gone by, one has watched the reactions from various quarters. Russian and French Presidents, the Arab League and many Non-Aligned States have reiterated the need for the United Nations. President Bush and Prime Minister Blair have met again a few days ago. The alliance between Blair and Bush, forged in troubled times, are beginning to exhibit a faint hint of fractured lines over the future of administering Iraq and the involvement of the United Nations in this scenario.

galloping across the Sinai and the Egyptians would have to fight. The standard response was, it is a going according to plan." A point came when the Egyptian army had crossed the Suez Canal and the Israelis were literally on the other side. The Soviet General asked his fellow Egyptian commander what was his plan now. The Egyptian General replied that they had retreated according to plan and were now waiting for the snow to fall in the desert of Sinai. After all, that had defeated Napoleon. Well, this was just a story doing the rounds in Cairo, before the valiant Egyptians were able to undo some of their losses in later years.

It is being claimed that care is taken to carry out precision strikes. Efforts are probably being made in this direction. However, when one missile goes astray, does it help to win the war for hearts and minds? White flags, cheering crowds are not in evidence and the worst case scenario is coming to roost.

A more measured tone is already surfacing in the House of Commons. Iraq today is caught up in a war of shifting alliances and hopes for a swift victory appears to have dissolved. Partial blame for this is being assigned to the Russians having allegedly supplied to the Iraqi establishment night sights for snipers, anti-tank rockets and

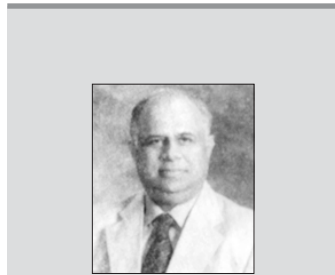
wrong, the danger of innocent people suffering more increases. There is now an information war amid that black, acrid smoke that covers the skies of Baghdad. Efforts are now underway to explore other possibilities, to find alternatives. Built up areas are being skirted around to avoid high risk urban combat. There is now a sense of urgency and overwhelming confidence has been replaced with a more cautious air. What worries many more is the absence, even after more than one week, of any evidence of Weapons of Mass Destruction. They are still a chimera. There has also not been emergence of any tactical weapons from the Iraqi side. This might significantly affect the international political response. Similarly, numerous anti-war protests in different countries of the world and the recent observation by the Vatican that they cannot bless the conflict as a just war can only heighten the resolve of the Iraqi population. It will in its own way probably also affect the psyche of the many regional countries who till now have not taken a hands-on approach to the problem.

Many are pointing out that the

country once the hostilities end.

This might be true, but what happens if the war continues and the Iraqi armed forces are able to successfully extend their unconventional asymmetric warfare. Does it mean that there will be another change in plan and that water and electricity supply structures would be hit in Baghdad, a city with a population of over six million of whom about two million are less than the age of fifteen? The imbroglio has been further confused with regard to Turkey and its role in its backyard -- the Kurdish enclave in North-Eastern Iraq. Turkey has already made it clear that its troops will preclude the prospect of any independent State of Kurdistan. It is a tense situation where Turkish tank turrets and battle hardened troops are effectively worrying the coalition strategic planners. Turkey is anxious about its own national security. It is clear that the United States is being caught in the middle. It obviously does not want to act as a referee, but is now left with few alternatives. Here too, emerging contingencies will probably require change in plans.

Reaping the whirlwind



IKRAM SEHGAL
writes from Karachi

BARELY past the first week the Coalition has had to twice change/adjust its war strategy. Instead of a cataclysmic strike by 3000 precision guided munitions (PGMs) hitting Baghdad and other Iraqi command centers, in a major surprise the war started with a limited surgical strike to take out (the exact word "decapitate") Saddam Hussain and his inner coterie. The Coalition checked effects, if any, for 24 hours before launching the ground war with an attempted end run (blitzkrieg) around major urban areas to Baghdad, an outflanking manoeuvre through the southern Iraqi desert. Rumsfeld's "shock and awe" massive strike came a day after the ground war started. The Iraqis were supposed to roll over and play dead or better still, surrender in droves (Gulf War I - circa 1991) on prime time TV. With the Iraqis fighting back at virtually every major urban area crossing, the plan deviated from the script. For a change, the Iraqis used their military (rather than emotional) head in not giving pitched battle in any open areas ("he who fights and runs away lives to fight another day") where the Coalition would have loved to pulverize them by superior firepower. Using classic guerrilla tactics, the Iraqis resorted to small unit "hit and run" attacks,

providing very few fixed targets for the PGMs to be effective.

The lack of a Northern Front imbalanced Coalition operations. With the overturning of the ban on Erdogan from becoming Turkish PM, the Turks changed to national interest in talking "Turkey First". Giving no inkling that they had no intentions of allowing US troops on Turkish soil in the face of massive street protests, on the eve of hostili-

ties the Turks conceded only to the use of an air corridor but no airbases or refueling facilities. Further bad news for the Coalition, Turkish ground troops are poised to cross into Northern Iraq "to stop the influx of Kurdish refugees", completely upsetting present and future US gameplans. Kurdish guerrillas want Turkish troops on Iraqi soil even lesser than Saddam's army, moreover they are not strong enough to open a second front without a solid contingent of Coalition troops. US troops have been ferried in to elongated airstrips (secured by US 173rd Airborne Brigade) in Kurdish controlled areas but whether this scratch force can become a credible threat in troops and equipment is not known. The Coalition sent a combination of US Special Forces and British SAS troops to seize two airfields H-2 and H-3, west of

Baghdad as per their original plan. During the first two days of the war when it seemed that there was no Iraqi resistance and Saddam Hussain had been seriously wounded, if not killed, there was controlled euphoria among Coalition planners, force-multiplied by live TV images in real time by "imbedded" journalists traveling at high speed with the attacking columns. When the resistance

perception of his being very much in control. This underscored the necessity of the Coalition prosecuting the war to a swift conclusion notwithstanding the weather getting very hot in Iraq. If the war persisted and casualties mounted, it would become politically hot in USA and UK for Bush and Blair. The next few days will be

soldiers edgy. Further delay works in Saddam's favour, the irony is President Bush could well be forced to authorize the military to use tactical nuclear strikes (neutron bombs), not far different from the weapons of mass destruction (WMD) he has been accusing the Saddam regime of. In this day and age, will the world accept this final injury to the affront of the contemptuous sidelining of the UN?

to either fathom or describe. The Iraqis will maximize exploitation of this religious site of Islam. What this foments in the streets of Cairo, Amman etc is another matter.

Winning the battle for Iraq, the Coalition will have lost the war for the hearts and minds of humanity. This is most unfortunate. Instead of bringing out the best in the American people, their large-heartedness, generosity, compassion, consideration, etc for other nations and races, the present US administration has put on public display a broad streak of meanness (personified the world over by Rumsfeld) not really representative of mainstream Americans. Instead of the shock of awesome power overwhelming opposition, the public perception is of a classic bully trying to subdue a defenceless weakling. That is not the done American thing, at least not as I know it. The great "not so silent" majority in the world always favours an underdog. Saddam Hussain is taking full advantage of this mass upsurge of negative feeling for the US. The Iraqi leader is a monster for whom one can have no sympathy, in contrast one does feel for innocent Iraqis. Unfortunately the way this war has been conceived and implemented blurs that sympathy-line.

A word of caution, some among us cannot restrain themselves in describing this war as "Islam against Kufir (non-believers)" this is not only untrue, it is blatantly stupid. The condemning of the war cuts across religions, races and/or civilizations, we Pakistanis should stop championing incongruous perceptions! As things stand today, those who have sowed the wild shall reap the whirlwind.

Ikram Sehgal, a former Major of Pakistan Army, is a political analyst and columnist.

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR

A British General in 1917

"Our armies do not come into your cities and lands as conquerors or enemies, but as liberators. Your wealth has been stripped of you by unjust men....The people of Baghdad shall flourish under institutions which are in consonance with their sacred laws."

I thought I should share the quote with the readers of *The Daily Star*.

Prof AKM Mohiuddin
lahangirinnagar University

War on Iraq: A different perspective

What's wrong with attacking Iraq and removing a dictator who has been terrorising the country for as

long as 34 years? Yes, USA might be looking for an unhindered flow of oil but obviously the Iraqis are not doing anything better with them. At least they will get to see what life looks like without fear of being jailed anytime or seeing wives and children being raped in front.

One can argue that this is their own business what they do with their own governance but the same people would beg for an assault in Bosnia or Kosovo where the whole civilised Europe, who are the biggest peace lovers now, failed to do anything to stop it, in turn helped the unprecedented genocide. Let's act wise and not get carried away by silly emotions.

Kamrul Naser
Piscataway, USA

A great tragedy

I am writing in response to the letter by Riki ("Senator Byrd", March 26).

It is very well clear that no country will ever trust the US and all the humanely promises made by it. (In a US dictionary humanely means 'always give a helping hand but be the first to loot that man'). In the current crisis it is not a man but a whole country. Surely the Americans have done a great number of humane acts. The Al-Qaeda has been crushed, though the mission cost a few (in American sense) innocent Afghans and only one wedding.

But that's meagre cost, after 9/11 the American economy has lost 100s of billion dollars. Yes it's a lot of money. So now the "Band of Undignified, Scary Hordes" have decided that they will make up for the loss by LOOTING the oils of Iraq. Why go for peaceful solutions? There is no reward in that. Senator John McCain, one of the greatest of Americans says, "It is not fair to allege that the US has demeaned itself or tarnished its

reputation". The man sure knows what he is saying. It is far from fair. The US cannot keep on deceiving people. It is not everyday that people around the whole world protest with one voice.

And yes the US is creating glorious history but only when Riki will read it. People are patiently watching the cowardly and inhuman acts of US but day by day the patience is getting heavier to carry.

Mohammad Tareque
Dhanmondi, Dhaka

Boycott US

Disappointed by our government's failure to take a solid stand on Iraq even as indiscriminate bombings drag into the first week feigning to "liberate the people of Iraq", perhaps it is up to the people to send a stronger message to the Bush administration. Boycott American products.

If the Indonesians and Germans can do it, why can't the Bangladeshis? After all, money talks. This war is about oil anyway.

Ayesha Farzana
Dhanmondi, Dhaka

An open letter to Jordan

I have been dumbfounded when I saw the news of Jordan's action at the advent of US invasion of Iraq. I cannot reconcile as to how and why Jordan preferred to become champion (?) for the American cause. They reportedly became the first Arab country to expel Iraqi diplomats whereas none of the US allies or cohorts even ventured till this writing to follow the US request--unjust, unreasonable, undesirable and undiplomatic.

So, wasn't it a mockery when the Jordan government reportedly was said to have been trying to distance itself from Iraq conflict which was

extremely crucial. Coalition Troops consisting of US 3rd Infantry Division (Najaf and Karbala), US 1st Marines Expeditionary Force (MEF) Division (Nasiriyah and Kut), US 101st Airborne Division and at least one Brigade each from US 1st Armoured Division and 82nd Airborne, followed by the high-tech US 4th Infantry Division (diverted to the Gulf from off shore Turkey) will soon be at the gates of Baghdad. Given long Lines of Communications (L of C), the "soft" targets of supply and maintenance will become increasingly vulnerable if the low-tech "hit and run" raids by guerrilla-type units persist. Logistics problems for a modern army multiplies during hot weather, men and equipment need water and fuel respectively in far greater quantities than is normal. Moreover fear of the unknown and fatigue saps morale and makes

the unilaterally orchestrated attack of the US and British demons on an independent state without the UN sanction?

How could a "sovereign nation" (Jordan) as claimed by its official become dictated by the greatest rogue of the century?

AF Rahman
Dhaka

Coalition of the unwilling

Why is suddenly there is a need to tell the world that, those "allies" who are joining the war with Bush, are actually doing it by their free will? Does it mean there is something fishy here? Perhaps, the coalition doesn't just consist of the "willing". What about all those who were bought with briefcase full of crispy dollars? What about those who are being bullied? What about those who are being intimidated? So

the final version of this coalition is more like "the coalition of the willing, bullied, bribed and intimidated". Not to forget those who are against the war, but are being dragged into this war against their will. So we now have "the coalition of the unwilling".

There are a lot of fancy terms which make me very excited. They make you think how clever and technical they are, don't they? I particularly like this one "I can't be any more specific, without revealing my sources". Well how could you, especially when your source is a PhD student! Here is another one "Undisclosed Location". Really? Where is that then?

When more than three quarter of the world population is not in Bush's coalition and "unwilling" to go to war, the best Mr Bush could come up with is "the coalition of the willing". What a joke!

Azad Miah
Oldham, U.K

Internet wonder

Internet is a fantastic wonder of modern science. With the help of the net, people can contact with rest of the world in a second. Internet also helps to learn about the world affairs at the earliest. People can communicate with their relatives and friends with the help of e-mail. They can even talk and watch with the help of net.

In Bangladesh Internet has already earned huge popularity. Unfortunately, net is not available in every region in Bangladesh. And most of the people are deprived of this excellent facility. If Internet could be made available for others and could be made cheaper, people would be benefited in numerous ways. Hope the authorities concerned would do the needful in this regard.

Afsana Rahman
Dhaka