

Iraq will lose, but will the US win?

US and UK stand remarkably isolated in today's global public opinion

THERE is hardly any doubt that Iraq will not be able to withstand the firepower of the mightiest army ever assembled on the face of the Earth. Today or tomorrow the valiant Iraqis will succumb to the superior technology of the US army. But will the US be able to withstand the moral-power that is increasingly gathering against it throughout the world?

We recall that it took many years after the Vietnam war started for the anti-war protests to gather momentum. What is fascinating and so very encouraging of the present world is that that in the case of Iraq, the anti-war protest started even before the war itself. From Japan, Australia on the East, to South Africa on the South to Norway, Sweden in the North to the very heart of the US in the West millions of ordinary citizens have marched for peace. Major US cities have all staged peace marches in spite of the most sophisticated war propaganda ever. Truly the US administration appears isolated in the global public opinion. Tony Blair's electorates are more than 70 percent against him on the war issue.

It is quite remarkable how the world has come together on the issue of peace and against the war. This in spite of the fact that Saddam is far from an ideal leader to support and a regime to back. The fact that the global public at large have been able to distinguish between the Iraqi people and its regime is also a heartening realisation.

A very important point to make is that the global public support for the Iraqi people has gone a long way to prove to the Muslims all over the world that this war is not the West versus Islam "clash" that some Western intellectuals tried to theorise and the Islamic extremist would love to establish. The outspoken stance of the Pope and the Western public's unrestrained and massive support for the people of Iraq and against the war have brought about a new internationalism. This internationalism is of the PEOPLE and not of the governments.

The question before us is, will this massive global protest against war have any impact on the decision in the US? Most likely not, and that will bring about the moral defeat of the US in the eyes of the world. The United States stood so very tall for its democracy, freedom and economic might just the other day, especially after the fall of the Soviet Union. Today, in so short a time, it stands so very isolated, shorn of its moral high ground and standing only on its military might. How ironic and sad.

War coverage

TV channels are losing reliability

THE television coverage of the events in the battlefields of Iraq by television channels like BBC and CNN has left a lot to be desired. The journalists embedded with the advancing troops have not really been able to dispatch the news of the encounters with the objectivity expected of them.

True, nobody expected to get an exact and accurate picture of the war all the time, particularly when the American generals had declared at the very outset that confusion would be used as weapon for undermining President Saddam Hussein's regime. But that confusion has clearly been dragged on to the point where the reporters are losing their credibility, and, more important, impartiality.

The barrage of half-truths and lies unleashed by the television channels has been rather baffling. It also confirms the fears that the coalition war machinery, including its propaganda outfit, is geared to achieve the same goals as any invading army would set in a situation like this.

There are too many examples of how unconfirmed reports have been given wide coverage in the television channels, which in the past used to enjoy a certain amount of respectability and reliability. The war correspondents and British military spokesperson made frantic efforts to establish their Basra uprising theory. But when nothing of the sort happened in two or three days, they finally gave up. Similarly, there was the report of a whole infantry division of the Iraqi army surrendering on March 21. But this report also fizzled out to another unsuccessful attempt to make imaginary gains. Even strategic analysts appearing on the television with the purpose of supplying back-up material to the reports lied glibly on matters of global concern.

The Americans have been doing whatever they can to trace chemical and biological weapons on Iraqi soil. Clearly, there is a battle going on beneath the hostilities on the surface to produce conclusive evidence that Saddam has those weapons at his disposal. That is understandable, but what is far less clear is why the journalists are not going by their professional ethics and norms.

Through the fog of war



M ABDUL HAFIZ

IN his 'Glimpses of World History' Jawaharlal Nehru famously called the big powers' scramble for dominance over China in 1898 under the threat of gunboats -- a 'highway robbery' and 'brigandage' of sorts. Had he not been spared by Providence the agony of witnessing what would happen in another clime a century later he would have seen today a 'daylight dacoity' being perpetrated in Iraq by the world's sole superpower faithfully abetted by Britain, once the world's greatest imperial power. Nothing -- no mass protests around the world, no norms and canons of international relations, no outrage of global community, no amount of condemnation both at home and abroad could stop Bush-Blair duo intoxicated with self-serving chauvinism from plunging the world in a cataclysm which would affect not just Iraq but entire mankind in one way or another. In attacking Iraq the US already trivialised its stature and accepted a moral defeat by being dislodged from a moral high ground it traditionally held as the champion of democracy, liberty and law guiding the conduct of the nations. It is a tragedy to watch the US jettisoning those lofty values by illegally and undemocratically invading a weak member of the

world body without a UN approval and any convincing reason.

Even if some Iraqis have grudge against Saddam Hussein who is certainly not above the board most others appear askance if the invading forces have come as 'liberators' or 'oil raiders' in their country -- now up for a grab. But they are absolutely united on one point: Iraq "the first Arab state to gain its independence in the twentieth

able to blunt the advance of the coalition forces. The speed with which their blitzkrieg began have subsequently slowed down and at places come to a grinding halt. As the war gathers momentum and the resistance stiffens the exasperated field commanders of the advancing column with their men exhausted with battle fatigue and inhospitable climatic conditions seem to be reaching a point of giving up -- a fact that has

well as wide scale destruction of public and private properties provoking bitterness and anger against Anglo-American 'predators' both in Iraq and the Arab world. The cowardly operation of dropping 'smart bomb' and 'bunker-brusters' on the country's thickly populated capital has obviously led to a terrible humanitarian crisis. The situation is equally grim in other built-up areas in the south.

underwent the same ordeal during the British mandatory rule after the First World War and are so well conversant with the game. It is no wonder that many self-respecting Iraqis -- it is learnt -- have turned down the invader's humanitarian assistance. Referring to the proposed debate on 'humanitarian aid in Iraq' the Iraqis' reaction has aptly been to deal with the first thing first and that 'first thing' is obviously the immediate vacation

PERSPECTIVES

As the war drags on both sides are hardening their attitude and the conflict is entering in its dirtiest phase. Following an awesome blood bath if the coalition is able to prevail it will nevertheless be looked upon as an occupation force and they can hardly achieve the coalition's objective beyond Saddam -- a pliant dispensation in Baghdad. It was tried earlier during the British mandate in Iraq with disastrous result. It is one thing to win a war with the sheer weight of a brute force but to carry that victory to a positive political consequence is another.

century does not relish the humiliation of being the first to lose it in twenty-first". When the independence -- albeit a survival with dignity -- is at stake the reaction is obvious and that's what we have been seeing through the fog of war in Iraq. It is a different Iraq from the one devastated through the first Gulf War followed by twelve years of draconian sanctions and the one, of which the invaders thought, would be brought to its knee in a sharp swift campaign. Dashing those hopes Iraq's army, now shorn of its chinks, however put up a resistance which not only did not allow the Anglo-American forces a cake-walk, the ragtag defenders also gave them a bloody nose.

A saga of bravery has been created by Iraq's para-military forces -- known as 'Fidayeen' -- as well as the people themselves who not only have withstood the onslaught of an overwhelmingly superior force, they have also been

prompted Washington to consider a reinforcement by dispatching additional 1,20,000 troops to the Gulf. This is however not without the unexpected set backs causing murmurs of criticism both in London and Washington. In a series of views and counter-views in the media and elsewhere the point still missing is that in an unjustly imposed war the moral strength always shifts on the side of victims and it is something which in a large measure decides the fate of war.

After having missed the prime target of the invasion's opening salvos of Tomahawks on Saddam's palace and failed to push through impregnable Iraqi resistance the coalition forces have now turned to B-52s and cruise missiles to be directed to their chosen targets. The last few days of the war have become dependant as and when the country is invaded and occupied by the 'predators'. Iraqis

The coalition forces are trying to capitalise on the prevailing human miseries with their noble pronouncements of bringing in humanitarian aid and other pious pretension to win over what they call 'the hearts and minds of the victims'. Some Iraqis will, no doubt, succumb to the temptation of having an access to these aid materials -- food, water and medicine -- under extremely trying conditions but the question asked by the baffled Iraqis is : why creating humanitarian crisis that would require humanitarian assistance to overcome? And that is not created overnight after the invasion has begun. The crisis has rather been deliberately created over last twelve years to pauperise the people of Iraq, the Arab world's most developed and one of the richest countries so that they become dependant as and when the country is invaded and occupied by the 'predators'. Iraqis

of aggression. Iraq insists on tackling the humanitarian crisis itself once the invaders quit.

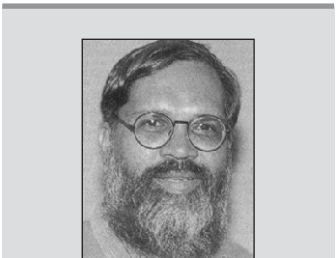
In the meantime Anglo-American intelligence agencies are also at work with their pet project of engineering an anti-Saddam uprising . They fondly hoped to exploit the Shi'ite and Kurd population for the purpose. They have been rearing so-called Iraqi opposition groups for years in Britain and America to this end. To their misfortune there has for been not even an attempt to challenge Saddam from any quarter so that aspirants to fill in the vacuum could be utilised to the US' advantage. Saddam is certainly not a role model of a leader that the Arab world would like to see but the present crisis and his continuing opposition to US-Israeli entente has given him the aura of an enduring icon not only before his people but entire public desperately in search of a hero. After the

Nasserite surge of Arab nationalism none other than Saddam contributed so significantly towards an Arab solidarity. Even if he is ultimately defeated he has already been ensured of his place in history not as a great Arab leader but at least as a symbol of defiance to the enemies of the humiliated lot of Arabs. As far as the Arabs are concerned this war could be a turning point in their chequered history but for the apathy of the Arab rulers and a vicious intra-Arab schism. Iraqi vice president Taha Yassir's impassioned call to Arab nations seems to have fallen totally on deaf ear. Arab rules have so far been mealy mouthed in expressing their solidarity against an attack on another country but in private the capitulated to American pressure -- ostensibly in exchange of handsome largesse -- and granted them bases, airspace and other facilities to strike at their Arab brothers.

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'Shock and awe' kills innocents



PRAFUL BIDWAI
writes from New Delhi

WHEN President Bush launched "shock-and-awe" on March 20, his advisers promised him a near-painless war leading to a quick "regime change". They believed a "decapitating" strike would eliminate President Saddam Hussein.

If that didn't work, 3,000 "Tomahawk" missiles fired in 48 hours -- more than the total used in the 1991 war -- would wreck Iraqi army's morale and trigger its disintegration, or a coup.

This strategy came a cropper. US intelligence agencies blundered in assessing the vulnerability of Iraq's command structure. This was akin to their terrible mistake in 1991 in bombing a civilian shelter in Baghdad, killing 400 innocent people believing that Mr Hussein was in it.

Last week, the Anglo-American war coalition took its own rhetoric about "liberating" Iraq seriously and launched an assault hoping the southern Shias would garland the invading troops, and Baghdad would soon fall. After all, the coalition

enjoys overwhelming superiority over half-disarmed, sanctions-battered, Iraq.

Totally forgotten were past lessons. The colonial British also promised to "liberate" Iraq from "tyrants". Gen Stanley Maude in 1917 said, like Gen Tommy Franks today: "Our armies do not come into your cities ... as conquerors ... but as liberators". Terrible tyranny followed. The Iraqis learned *never* to trust imperial powers.

"Shia rebellion".

If this is a prelude to what's to come in Baghdad, then US-UK could get sucked into close-quarter combat -- in which they enjoy little advantage, unlike in high-technology warfare.

So far, Iraq's command has held. Mr Hussein is in control. If this persists, the US will have two options in Baghdad: get into street-to-street warfare, or use indiscriminate force, by bombing civilian

wide outrage.

The vital issue is, how many casualties is the US-UK prepared to suffer? Gulf veteran General Barry McCaffrey says the casualties could be as high as 3,000 dead!

The US public is shocked by Iraq's capture of seven prisoners of war. Washington has accused Iraq of "parading" and mistreating them, violating the Geneva Conventions. Iraq indeed displayed the PoWs. This was wrong, although

Why has the US taken such grave risks while mobilising a formidable armada to bludgeon Iraq? American objectives go beyond oil, and are rooted in plans to establish total global supremacy. The US wants to redraw the map of the Middle East and redesign the world order -- through military hegemony. Nothing sums up this grand venture better than the Washington-based think-tank, Project for the New American Century. PNAAC wants an Empire, in which the US alone has veto power and calls all the shots.

The coalition has suffered setbacks, which can potentially change the war's course, especially its *political* complexion. These include resistance and anger against the invasion, death of 49 Western soldiers, a fratricidal American attack, and re-eruption of "guerrilla" fighting. Quite simply, *the Iraqis are fighting -- not for Mr Hussein, but to defend their nation!*

Resistance has proved damaging to the war coalition in almost every town. It took five days to "pacify" Umm Qasr after its "fall". Iraq's only deep-sea port, Umm Qasr has a population of 4,000. What happens in Basra (pop 1.5 million) can only be imagined. The British are now targeting its civilians. They are also inventing a

facilities or residential areas -- as happened on March 26 in a Baghdad market where 17 civilians were killed.

Among US options are "e-weapons" and "microwave pulse-bombs". Although called "non-lethal", these can be horrific. Pulse-bombs release microwave radiation, which instantly "fries" electronic circuits within 2-2.5 kilometres, melting radars, computers, radios, hospital machinery, even pace-makers. This last is like your heart exploding!

Such methods will kill innocent people by the *thousand!* But they won't stop urban guerrillas. The occupiers will probably retaliate with excessive force -- like Israel does in Palestine, causing world-

Iraq didn't "parade" them.

The British were far worse in displaying Iraqi prisoners handcuffed or marching with their arms raised. US troops even forced Iraqi PoWs to kneel and strip-searched them.

The Geneva Conventions are primarily about protecting innocent civilians -- whom the US-UK are shooting. Only one convention deals with PoWs' harassment, or subjecting them to "insults and public curiosity". This description is inappropriate in the Iraqi case. The PoWs were not humiliated -- unlike in 1991.

The US follows double standards. Take Guantanamo Bay, where over 600 Al-Qaeda suspects lie detained, often in chains, worse

its own unpopularity in Arabia. In Jordan, the ratio of positive to negative perceptions of the US has decreased from 34/61 to 10/81.

Even Turkey has refused to station US troops, thus denying easy access to northern Iraq. It has offered overflight rights on condition that its forces enter northern Iraq to hit the Kurds. This has further alienated the Kurds from the US.

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Nothing sums up this grand venture better than the Washington-based think-tank, Project for the New American Century. PNAAC wants an Empire, in which the US *alone* has veto power and *calls* all the shots. Such "full-spectrum" dominance precludes even "advanced industrial nations ... aspiring to a larger regional or global role".

PNAAC's members include Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld, Richard Perle, Paul Wolfowitz, Jeb Bush, etc, who are all at the apex of power. President Bush has implemented some key PNAAC recommendations. This war is only one of them.

Mr Perle admitted this on March 21 at a briefing of the American Enterprise Institute. The super-hawks' short-term post-war agenda? Radical reform of the UN, "regime change" in Iran and Syria, and "containment" of France and Germany!

The world's up against demonically powerful forces. We must resist their unjust, horrible war. It's Iraq and Iran's turn today. It could be Pakistan or India's tomorrow. This is *not* alarmism. A visit to << www.newamericancentury.org >> reveals it's the cold truth.

So, our government and political parties shouldn't waffle on Iraq. Our citizens must take the peace movement seriously by joining it.

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Impact of Iraq war: Suffering for South Asia

ZAGLUL A CHOWDHURY

THE United States-led military assault in Iraq is adversely impacting the political and, more importantly, economic conditions of the South Asian countries despite the fact that the region is not much adjacent to the site of the war. It is because South Asia has strong political and economic links with the Middle East and Gulf as much as it has with two main nations leading the war -- the United States and Britain. However, the expression "war" is not exactly appropriate here since there is a raging debate whether the American-led military offensive is more an "invasion" or "attack" than a war which brings contending sides to open hostilities. It is a scenario where the United States and two other countries -- Britain and Australia -- are involved in a massive land, air and sea borne assault on Iraq which has no other option but to defend itself against the might of the only superpower of the world and other strong nations.

When a country has to face the inevitable much to its unwillingness like the present condition of Iraq against the highly advanced and superior opponents, this

probably cannot be characterised as "war". While there may be a debate on the rationale of the reasons cited by the governments of the United States and Britain for military action, there is hardly any controversy that the offensive is basically an invasion. Even though some media mainly from some Western countries describe the conflict as a "war", most across the world including the media in Bangladesh call the development an "invasion" or "attack" for the simple reason that the United States-led alliance made no bones of the fact that it would take on Iraq regardless of the approval of the United Nations.

As the last-ditch effort by the UN to avert the war failed, Washington lost no time to swing into its much anticipated measure involving more than a quarter million troops with another more than forty thousand from its principal ally Britain and about two thousand from Australia. Needless to say that Canberra's despatch of troops has come somewhat as a surprise to many as it is seen as largely going out of its ways to placate the Americans. The massive protests by the Australian people notwithstanding, the government of prime minister John Howard remains stuck to involve his country's troops in the military

operations in Iraq. Demonstrations of massive scales even in the cities of the United States and Britain give a sombre reminder that the measures against Baghdad is unjust. South Asian countries are not much in variance in calling this invasion lacking legitimacy.

There is not much difference in the approaches of the regional nations to the Iraq conflict although some are vocal in

expressing disapproval of the military actions while some others are less vociferous. Anyway, what unites the South Asia on this issue is that all countries are against the war and witnessing anti-war demonstrations. Despite close links with the United States, these countries have given vent to their feelings on the conflict. However, some governments and political parties -- whether in power or in the opposition -- have shown caution in reacting to the development despite their disapproval, understandably for the reason not to annoy much the superpower. But the reactions of the people encouraged them to adopt a more

critical position against the military offensive. After all, for countries not allied with those leading the attack it is extremely difficult to support an action that is essentially dangerous in nature and without the authorisation of United Nations Security Council.

South Asia is no exception and more so because here the mood of the people basically concerns the woes of a third world nation which

conflict draws longer than expected. Already some people have returned to Bangladesh from the Middle East and same is the case with other countries of the area. The turns and twists of the war may cause in the fall of the flow of remittances and squeezing in the job opportunities in the Gulf.

However, some Bangladesh nationals left for the Middle East even after the break of the conflict,

which indicates that their earlier signed contract has not been annulled as yet and the allies of the United States in the region like Kuwait, Qatar and Bahrain appear secure at the present stage. Other countries which are close to Washington but have not taken a total pro-American policy in the current crisis, like Saudi Arabia, have huge workforce from Bangladesh and other countries of the region. Such countries still are safe and the expatriates believe they would not be much affected unless the war prolongs, causing severely adverse economic reactions for these countries.

Some Arab nations, like Syria,

have taken strong anti-American posture in the conflict but not too many expatriates from South Asia are in these countries. As such, much of the South Asian workforce in the Gulf is less affected till now. Some have started returning fearing insecurity and apprehending bad days ahead. This is still in marginal scale. But the situation may change for the worse depending on the overall war situation and

in such an event the South Asian countries will suffer heavily as all rely on their workforce in the Gulf.

Likewise, they have good number of people in both US and Britain, where many have taken citizenship or permanent residence. The war is costing heavily on both the nations even though they are rich and can absorb the expenditures. But if the conflict takes a difficult turn and prolongs, both Washington and London will need more and more money to sustain the massive war and this consequently affect their economy. President Bush has sought 75 billion dollars from the Congress

for the war. South Asians living there may feel the pinch of the worsening economy which in the process affect their countries that benefit from their remittances.

A lingering crisis may also hit the trade and business and Bangladesh's readymade garments sector may be a sufferer in case the conflict lingers and spreads.

South Asia stands to be hit from situations both in the Gulf and the United States and Britain as a sequel to the conflict. Socio-economic conditions of these countries stand to suffer badly as a result of the war. There are other fallouts of the conflict on South Asia. The peace dialogue to resolve the longdrawn civil war in Sri Lanka has been postponed due to the Iraq war as the latest round of dialogue in Japan was called off since the global focus is now totally on the Gulf. In Afghanistan, which is not exactly in South Asia but at the vicinity of this region, the Iraq war may have an influence since the outcome of the war may change the mood in the country which not long ago was given a new political look by the Americans. The Talebans are totally out but eastern Afghanistan witnessed big anti-American demonstration centring the Iraq war, first against Washington in the country since the

changeover effected through American military might. The success of the US-led force will help silence such sentiments but a debacle may embolden them.

South Asia has big stakes in the current conflict centring Iraq. The region itself is often an international flashpoint since its political environment mostly remains hostile and tense. Even now the atmosphere is not one of peaceful and so much so that a planned summit of the leaders of seven nations is being delayed indefinitely because of lack of conducive conditions. Nonetheless, the situation here is not volatile for sometime past. The brutality of war is coming afresh to the minds of the people as they remain glued to the television and newspaper for update on Iraq war. This may help warring countries feel discouraged about conflicts in their own region as horrors of conflict is crystal clear. However, the nature of conflicts are different here. Still, the tendencies for war and hawkish approaches may receive a back seat following the unwanted devastations of Iraq war.

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