

Can we take a break from this war?

SAGAR CHAUDHURY

NOT at all an easy thing to do, I know, but there are other things going on in the world as well as all of us also know. These may not be quite as dramatic or exciting, as tragic or agonising, as attention-grabbing or potentially dangerous, but life *does* go on, war or no war. The day war painfully forced its way into the homes of hundreds of thousands of Britons as the huge cargo aircraft carrying the bodies of the first British servicemen killed in battle landed at the Oxfordshire airbase of the RAF, also began as the day before and the day before and before and ended in more or less the same fashion as the days following it. The front page of the daily broadsheet that I normally read had a picture of the coffin of one of the first British soldiers to die in Iraq, draped in the Union flag, being carried across the tarmac. Next to it was a despatch by the newspaper's Washington correspondent under the headline: "Saddam: I'll hit UK with terror squads!" Below it, at the bottom of the page, there was an advertisement of an airline offering cheap flights to several holiday destinations and declaring: "There has never been a better time to live life to the full." As I turned the pages, my eyes fell on an appeal by the British Red Cross for gifts and donations to help tackle the "Iraq crisis", flanked on one side by a travel agency's advertisement of conducted tours of the Scottish islands and another on the other side inviting readers to try out "All Seasons Goose Down Duvelts" guaranteeing sweet dreams at 50% off on original prices.

Life does not stop for anyone -- not for George Bush and Tony Blair and Saddam Hussein, neither does it even slow down its pace for 19-year old David Clarke of the First Royal Regiment who was planning to get married when he returned from the war but now never will even though he has returned, nor for Sufian al Buthaina,

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So as far as Iraq is concerned, the United States is in the secure position of "heads I win, tails you lose." After the war the Americans can tell the Iraqis: "Look, we have destroyed most of your country -- but don't worry, we'll put everything right, re-build everything, although you'll have to pay for all the work yourselves." And the Iraqis will have no choice but to accept that "generous" offer... All we can do is wait -- and watch the players make their moves. But can we not also protest -- demand that this relentless toying with the fates of innocent people must cease, permanently?

the young Jordanian studying geography at Baghdad University who had telephoned his anxious family to tell them that he was safe only minutes before the car he was travelling in was hit by an American missile, nor also for Fateha Ghazi, the Iraqi mother whose seven-year old daughter Rana was killed in another US missile attack. So let us take that break from war, shall we, for a few minutes at least, and turn our attention to the normal business of living.

Is this the beginning of the end?

The end of the beginning, more likely. I started writing the current London Letter three days ago and got as far as the paragraph above. Yesterday morning, as I turned the television on and selected BBC News 24, I saw pictures of British tanks and armoured vehicles moving towards the centre of Basra, encountering, as claimed by a senior army officer, "little resistance on their way." This was followed by the scene of a "friendly" football match being played between British soldiers and local Iraqis on a field surrounded by bombed and still-smoking build-

ings, with the same officer declaring that this was proof that the British troops had started winning the trust of the natives. How much of this footage was doctored is anybody's guess, but it certainly indicated that the tide had started turning in favour of the coalition forces, one way or another. Next came pictures of American forces taking control of Saddam International Airport -- which, incidentally, the coalition has already renamed Baghdad International Airport -- and long columns of tanks and armoured vehicles making their way towards the centre of Baghdad itself, with hardly any evidence of the dreaded Iraqi Republican Guards attempting to obstruct their progress. The US military command based in Qatar claimed that their forces had taken control of one of Saddam Hussein's palaces near the Information Ministry building.

By the time this London Letter reaches the readers, the coalition forces will almost certainly have finished the job of taking over Iraq, most of it anyway, although whether they will succeed in achieving their principal goal -- eliminating Saddam Hussein himself -- is by no means certain, which, in its turn, will still leave the final outcome of this war clouded in uncertainty. Anyway, we will all know in a matter of days, but it seems that what I really wanted to do -- forget the war for a few minutes and attend to other things -- will have to wait for the time being.

Only day before yesterday I was having a conversation with a long-time friend of mine, Dr Mustaq Khan, a highly respected economist and distinguished academic, and wanted to know what he personally thought was the real motive behind this war and whether it was at all avoidable. Dr Khan was quite positive that it could not be avoided -- whether it could start much later than when it did start was a different question, he said, but it was bound to start sooner or later, and that the United Nations was in effect powerless to prevent it. According to him, the position of the USA in relation to that international body is that it is willing to comply with UN resolutions as long as they are not in conflict with US interests. Many say that the USA's chief motive is its desire to gain control of Iraqi oil, but actually it is much deeper and more complex than that. Among the present right-wing US administration there is a more die-hard, far right-wing faction comprising of persons like Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld, Condoleezza Rice, Richard Pearl etc which set up the New American Century Foundation nearly ten years ago with the express purpose of promoting American interests all over the globe and controlling, wherever possible and considered necessary, all those areas vital for the Americanisation of the world. There is

nothing hush-hush about this Foundation, its charter of aims and objectives is openly available over the internet, and it is in fact the real guiding spirit behind present-day US policies.

In the post-Soviet Union era, America sees itself as the only true superpower with the capacity to become the guardian of the rest of the world in the spheres of economics, politics and military might, and it is prepared to eliminate anything or anybody that may threaten to become an obstacle in its path. To this end, it set up definite targets in its sight, namely, China, Iraq, Syria and Libya in that order, that have the potential to become threats to American plans of world domination. China, of course, is not a soft target -- at the moment the United States lack the confidence to enter into direct confrontation with China and there is nothing in that country's domestic spheres and international policies that can be used as a pretext to interfere. Iraq, on the other hand, is an easier target -- the United States have had it in its sights ever since 1991, and the accusation that Saddam Hussein is stockpiling weapons of mass destruction as well as replenishing his bio-chemical arsenal, is nothing more than just a pretext.

According to Dr Khan, even as the UNO was about to send the weapons inspectors back into Iraq, the USA knew very well that nothing of any significance would be found but that would provide them with just what they needed -- a pretext to start war. It is not that Iraqi oil is not important to the USA -- it is the very thing that will enable them recover the enormous cost of the war without suffering any serious financial setbacks themselves. After the war, when the task of reconstruction and rehabilitation begins, most of the major contracts will doubtlessly go to American companies -- Colin Powell has already stated that nothing should go France's or Germany's or Russia's way because they were against the war -- and all the costs will be borne by funds generated by the sale of Iraqi oil. That is why the USA is not at all keen on leaving the post-war reconstruction and rehabilitation of Iraq in the hands of the UNO, whereas they were quite cordial in welcoming the UNO into post-war Afghanistan. That is because Afghanistan is a very poor country with no resources of its own and all its reconstruction and rehabilitation programmes had to be and are still being funded by international donor countries. But Iraq's case is different -- Iraq has the resources to pay for all that will be needed. In fact, among all the Arab countries Iraq under Saddam Hussein is probably the only one which has been totally independent commercially, industrially and economically, in spite of all the sanctions imposed on it over the years.

So as far as Iraq is concerned, the United States is in the secure position of "heads I win, tails you lose." After the war the Americans can tell the Iraqis: "Look, we have destroyed most of your country -- but don't worry, we'll put everything right, re-build everything, although you'll have to pay for all the work yourselves." And the Iraqis will have no choice but to accept that "generous" offer.

As I said before, this is more likely the end of the beginning. We are now into the next act which has just started and we do not know what else it will reveal before our eyes. Neither do we know how many acts we will have to endure before the final curtains. All we can do is wait -- and watch the players make their moves. But can we not also protest -- demand that this relentless toying with the fates of innocent people must cease, permanently?

My great fear is that nobody is listening!

BILLY I AHMED

THE war in Iraq continues. And so the destruction and killing: Can we find unity in our humanity?! The feeling is quite surreal. It is like being carried inexorably against your will. It elicits a sense of powerlessness. I search to find the words to utter a protest. They do not come easily. That is what I am experiencing as I watch them rush headlong toward war.

My disease does not arise from a favourable view of Iraq. I am not unaware of the criminal records of Saddam Hussein. So I have to state that none of the arguments being put forth today to hype this all but inevitable war are to me compelling.

Those arguments, as rehearsed daily in the western newspapers, TV talk shows, magazines and radio are as follows:

Iraq harbours terrorists. But so do Palestine, Syria, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan. It is also a fact that Germany, Great Britain and the United States have been home to terrorist groups.

Saddam has murdered his own people. While murdering one's own citizens is tragic, it is not unknown in history. Russia has done it in Chechnya, China has done it in Tiananmen Square, Germany has done it against the Jews, and in the United States, this tactic has been used against Native and African-Americans.

Saddam has chemical and biological weapons and is seeking a nuclear capability. But many nations of the world, including the United States, have chemical and biological weapons. Russia, Great Britain, Pakistan, India, France, and China all have atomic weapons and North Korea is said to be near that breakthrough, while Iran has missiles on the assembly line.

Saddam is evil. But so are or were Mugabe in Zimbabwe, Idi Amin in Uganda, Caeusescu in Rumania, Milosevic in Yugoslavia and Pinochet in Chile.

It is, I believe, because this case for war against Iraq is so weak, that there has been a vigorous attempt at the highest levels of US government to link Saddam with the terrorists of 9/11. But, such a linkage has been denied in every intelligence briefing to Congress, a fact noted by the bipartisan chair and vice-chair of the Senate Intelligence Committee. But, then the war hawks shout, 'did not the citizens of Iraq cheer the September 11 attack upon the United States with parades of chanting people in the streets?' Yes, but so did many people in Syria, Saudi Arabia, Palestine, Egypt and Pakistan.

America is not universally popular. So what is the real source of this visceral hatred of Iraq that today has created this eagerness for war? I wish I had a clear answer. I do not. All I can do is speculate. The readers must take these comments and questions for what they are mere speculations.

So ask yourselves, 'could any one of these possibilities be factors in that combustible mix that is fuelling their passion to go to war?' Dismiss them all if you wish, but allow them to be raised.

Is the US motivated by the frustration of its unfinished and apparently unwon war against terrorism? The US was attacked brutally on September 11th 2001. Despite a massive military effort to defang the terrorists, more than a year has passed and not even Afghanistan can be said to be secure or

stable. Neither Osama Bin Laden nor the former head of the Taliban Government has been captured or confirmed as dead. Most of the hunted Al Qaida operatives, central to the devastation of September 11, simply disappeared into the mountains of Afghanistan. They continue to engage in hit-and-run guerrilla attacks, in which a building is blown up here and a bus there. These attacks, like the Tet offensive of Vietnam, remind us that this enemy has neither been destroyed nor rendered harmless. Is it possible that compared to these secretive and illusive terrorists, Iraq represents a visible enemy that US could crush militarily? Would that ease our haunting sense that the terrorists do not fight

maladies to a foreign threat. It rouses patriotic feelings and diverts the latent hostility to an outside enemy. People rally around the commander-in-chief in a time of peril. The payoff is the control of both houses of Congress. No political party is above trying to set the debate for its own political gain. Of course that will be angrily denied and impugning the patriotism of those who pose this issue is the classic defence.

Does the defeat of Iraq serve America's interests by making Middle Eastern oil available to the oil thirsty Western world? Iraq has huge oil reserves. If Saddam were defeated, a friendly government in Baghdad that owed its allegiance to US military might, would surely be cooperative. Never again would America be held

I believe that American power carries with it a responsibility to set an example of freedom. It gives us the ability to hold before the world a vision of liberty and justice available to all people. What message does the world hear from America's rumblings of war?...A free nation, no matter how powerful, cannot finally defend itself against those who are willing to die in order to inflict pain on the ones they think of as their enemies. Americans may well conquer the world with their power only to discover that they have become vulnerable to decades of terrorist acts which will suck the very life out of the freedom that made America possible.

in a way that we understand? A successful conventional war might repair the damaged psyche the US has sustained at the hands of the terrorists. Is that a possibility?

Are there political reasons of US for this war? This has been suggested by foreign leaders and recently by Vermont's Senator Jeffords, that body's sole official from the Independent Party in the United States. It is a fearful possibility. Yet there are some political realities that cannot be denied. The economy is in a shambles. The stock market is at a five-year low. Fortunes and retirement accounts across America have been lost. It really doesn't matter what caused this economic depression, the party in power inevitably gets blamed for it.

The midterm elections in U.S. are about a month away. Just a few weeks ago the driving agenda for these elections was the state of this economy and the factors, including corporate corruption, that have fed its collapse. A powerful motive exists for shifting the political debate from these domestic

hostage to Middle Eastern oil. Democracy, once installed in Iraq, so this argument goes, might then have a ripple effect all over that region. Is there at least a germ of truth in this intriguing possibility?

Is there some unfinished family business here? The first Bush administration was a one-term presidency. Among the perceived shortcomings of that administration was the failure to finish the task in Iraq. The first President Bush left Saddam in power when his nation was on the ropes and his army in retreat. Does the son of this president feel a compelling need to write a new ending to this piece of history? I do not know, I simply wonder.

I raise these questions as one who is grateful for America. But by America, I mean the dreams that are embodied in the Declaration of Independence, the ideals found in the Constitution and even the hopes expressed in the Gettysburg address. These are the things that have made America a beacon of hope to oppressed people everywhere. Yet these are also the very things that I

see being tarnished when President Bush Jr., the nation's leader speaks of preemptive strikes. These dreams, ideals and hopes are bent out of shape by the suggestion that it is 'our right', in violation of international law, 'to remove from power any government' US does not approve. They are ripped as under by US' willingness to use its enormous military might to impose 'our will on a nation so that it does not pose a clear threat to our national existence'.

I believe that American power carries with it a responsibility to set an example of freedom. It gives us the ability to hold before the world a vision of liberty and justice available to all people. What message does the world hear from America's rumblings of war? By ignoring 'inconvenient' world opinion in order to rush into war, are they not in danger of becoming a nation more loathed than respected in the court of world opinion? Is that what the American dream has become?

Human beings have always had deep tribal needs. To preserve their particular tribe or nation, human beings have throughout history done dreadful things to one another. These evil deeds are both noticed and long remembered. That is what feeds the current hatred in such places as Ireland and Northern Ireland, Pakistan and India, Israel and the Middle East. If power is used to impose US nation's will on another with little regard for their common humanity, the seeds of an enduring bitterness will be sown and the people of that nation and its secret admirers will find a way to strike back someday, even if it comes generations or even centuries later. Terrorism is one of those ways.

A free nation, no matter how powerful, cannot finally defend itself against those who are willing to die in order to inflict pain on the ones they think of as their enemies. Americans may well conquer the world with their power only to discover that they have become vulnerable to decades of terrorist acts which will suck the very life out of the freedom that made America possible. If America does not find some unity in their humanity, then the tribal claims of competing nations will finally destroy civilisation itself.

The very dream that America personifies compels me to cry out against this relentless war frenzy. I want to shout No! No! No! to the path that we now are walking. My great fear is that nobody is listening.

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All health information to keep you up to date

ABC of insomnia

Insomnia is described as a symptom and not a disease and there are three different degrees of insomnia -- transient, which lasts a few days; short term, lasting a few weeks; or chronic which lasts more than a month. It is not a small problem and the cost to the community in terms of illness, injury and loss of productivity could run into the millions of taka. According to experts there are thousands of Bangladeshis who suffer from chronic insomnia.

Stress is considered to be one of the main causes of short term sleeping problems. It can also be triggered by events including relationship problems, bereavement, financial problems, depression of the birth of a child. Medical conditions such as asthma, osteoporosis and digestive problems can also interfere with sleep. A demanding schedule at work and personal stress can also disturb sleep patterns.

Some patients managed their sleep problems using an incredible form of self-treatment called 'Bright Light Therapy'. Research in this area has been conducted on animals for the last 20 years, but it is only more recently that it has been shown that humans can be affected by bright light in the same way as animals. The theory is that we all have a 24-hour body clock and sunlight is the device, which keeps us synchronised. But stay up too late or sleep in and our clocks get out of sync. Bright light therapy is used to put things straight. Researchers are confident that this therapy is at least as effective as sleeping tablets -- if not more so.

The missing link in the puzzle was which body part receives the light and tells our body clock. It couldn't be the eyes because blind people also suffer jet lag. Researchers found there are light receptor cells in different parts of the body and one study found even shining light on the back of the knees was enough to reset to internal clock.

In future, we could see people recovering from jet lag with 'do it yourself light therapy' but of course bright light therapy by itself won't assure you of a good night's sleep.

These might help:
to have a regular wake up time
to go to bed when you are feeling tired, not just because it's a good time if you're awake after 25 minutes in bed, you should get up and read or do something, then go back to bed when you're tired
and lastly, caffeine can stay in your body for up to 10 hours.

Did you know?

There are about 100 touch receptors in each fingertip.

Next: Around the world.