

Is Syria next and then Iran?

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DESPIITE the opposition of most people in the world -- including those in Britain and Australia (partners in the Coalition) -- and without the sanction of the UN, the US-led coalition attacked Iraq in the name of destroying "weapons of mass destruction" (WMD) and replacing autocracy with democracy in the country. And now we hear from the US government that there is yet another country in the region, Syria, which is also guilty of committing so many crimes, including developing chemical weapons and harbouring terrorists to the detriment of the Free World. Is the US going to invade Syria next and afterwards Iran, another member of George Bush's "axis of evil", along with North Korea and Iraq? One does not know where the US paranoia about terrorist attacks on its territory and interests would lead the whole world to! However, one thing has become clear from the so-called preemptive attack on Iraq by the US-led coalition is that the world is going backward to the days of Napoleon, Hitler and Mussolini.

So far what has been achieved in Iraq after the removal of the tyrannical Saddam regime is not at all impressive. And the way the US-led coalition has been mishandling the situation in post-Saddam Iraq gives one every reason to question the modus operandi and the intentions of the occupying forces. One does not see any positive sign in the direction towards "bringing democracy" to Iraq. Not only has the post-Saddam Iraq witnessed unprecedented looting, pillaging and destruction of museums and libraries (reminiscent of the Sack of Baghdad by Halagu Khan in 1258?) but it has also been giving ominous signals to the world.

Now people everywhere, including the streets of Baghdad, Mosul and Basra, without much ambiguity are raising the question about the veracity of the so-called Road Map of the Bush-Blair duumvirate. Is the US going to formalise Pax Americana with a view to controlling the oil fields and other US interests in the region by turning Iraq, and eventually Syria and Iran, the two *betenaires* in the region, into US satellites(?) is the question. Thousands of Iraqis have already started demonstrating on the streets, chanting "No Saddam, No America" slogan. And this strengthens the hypothesis that long-term Anglo-US presence in Iraq, let alone any

attempt to invade Syria and Iran, would be disastrous both for the region and the would-be hegemons.

Despite their repeated denials that no military action against Syria is imminent or likely, the way the Bush-Rumsfeld-Powell triumvirate is pointing finger at Syria, as the new target is least comforting for the country and the peace loving people of the world. One wonders if the Coalition is going to "restore democracy" in Syria as well, in accordance with their "Road Map", which one believes is very different from the published version of it, which prom-

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ises a Palestinian state and liberal democracy in the whole of Middle East.

It is preposterous to suggest that only Syria violated the UN sanctions against Iraq by trading with the country up to the last days of Saddam regime. It is amazing that the blaming game of the US stops at the gates of Syria while Turkey and Jordan could also be dragged into the game for their "association" with Saddam regime. The most surprising (and amusing) part of the allegation is about Syria violating the UN sanctions against Iraq. It gives the impression that as if the US has been so respectful of the world body, its charter and resolutions!

While George W. Bush is harping on: "Syria just needs to cooperate with us", in the most unconvincing manner devoid of any conviction, Donald Rumsfeld is telling the world that Syria committed "a lot of bad mistakes" by providing vital spare parts, including night-vision goggles, to

Iraq during the recent invasion of the country, and by allowing "senior Iraqi people" to moving into Syria. He is also critical of Syria for allowing Arab volunteers to cross the border into Iraq to fight the Coalition. Most of these charges are spacious and unsubstantiated. And again, as one British analyst has put it, if pro-Israeli American volunteers could be allowed to go and fight for Israel, why the US should have a double standard with regard to pro-Iraqi Arab volunteers going to Iraq to fight for the country?

The most serious allegations about Syria's harbouring

"terrorist groups operating against Israel" and its promotion of WMD seem to be lop-sided as well. While Syria's Golan Heights is still under Israeli occupation, in contravention of several UN resolutions since 1967, it is only natural that Syria would do everything possible to regain its lost territory. It is altogether a different matter how one defines the Syrian and other anti-Israeli Arab forces. Throughout history, someone's "freedom fighter" has always been someone else's "terrorist" as the British government rejected the American freedom fighters as "gangs of miscreants" in the 18th century. This denial of the truth is universal.

Any attempt to single out Syria or Iran does not smack of objectivity and impartiality on part of the US while Israel has more than a hundred nuclear war heads and tons of chemical and biological weapons, and long-range ballistic missiles. And neither the US nor its allies have ever pointed finger at Israel. We know Syria has stocks of sarin, mustard gas and VX but no nuclear capability to match, let alone overpower Israel, in the most unlikely event of a Syrian invasion of Israel. What is interesting is that Syria has proposed through the UN to declare (and make) the Middle East free from all WMD, including nuclear arms. Will the US and Israel agree to denuclearise Israel and destroy its WMD(?) is the question.

In view of the above, one has every reason to argue that the US paranoia about the so-called WMD is just a distraction from the real issues. By now it has been established that the US did not invade Iraq to get rid of WMD, as nothing has been found there to buttress the assertion. One possibly does not go that far as one former CIA official has publicly asserted that the US is going to plant such weapons in Iraq just to justify the invasion.

The not-so-implicit threat against Syria suggests that Syria's anti-Israeli stand is the *casus belli* as Iraq's oil along with its anti-Israeli policy have been its nemesis. One may, in this regard, quote one American general who during the Gulf War of 1991 quite candidly confessed: "Had Kuwait grown carrots, we would not have been there". Perhaps it is not out of the place to argue that had Syria been timid and loyal enough to cow tow the US and Israel like most of its Arab neighbours, Bashar Asad would not have any reason to worry about any invasion of his country.

Now, if the US finally decides to attack Syria first and then Iran (and eventually Pakistan?) would it make America safer than ever before? Bush administration's irresponsible rhetoric about Syria and Iran suggests that it has simply failed to grasp the intensity of Muslim antagonism towards

the US (thanks to the wrong advice and slanted analyses of US think tanks and the CIA) in the wake of the fall of Baghdad. One may point out in this regard how the CIA and Pentagon could not foresee the Iranian Revolution and afterwards miserably failed to realise that Khomeini and his associates were interested in political power. It seems, Bush and his advisers are still in the dark, not being able to realise how the world sympathy in general, and Muslim sympathy in particular, for the US evoked in the wake of the ghastly Nine-Eleven is waning fast after the attack on Iraq which has so far only brought death, destruction and misery to millions of innocent Iraqi civilians.

What is also missing in the analyses of US experts and wishful thinking of the Bush administration is their total disregard for how humiliated, helpless and angry Arabs in particular and Muslims in general feel about the fall of Baghdad. The US alienation, a by-product of power-drunk arrogance, is shrouding the reality for the average American. It seems the US is totally unaware of the reality that for its duplicity and violation of international law in the name of democracy and freedom, it has hardly any credibility in the Third World in general and the Muslim world in particular.

It is high time that the US administration pay heed to the danger of further terrorist attacks on US interests at home and abroad. An understanding of the root causes of terrorism is much more important than finger pointing at its possible or likely sources (often based on convoluted intelligence). The US should try to understand that terrorists do not always leave a home address. And is there any point in finding out the details about a suicide bomber? Terrorism is not an end in itself -- it is just a means. And like any other organic growth, it is nurtured by various factors. Ignoring the socio-economic and political roots of the so-called Islamic terror, as the US has been unwittingly doing, does not weed out the syndrome. In sum, terrorism is the last resort of the desperate people. Unless some positive steps are taken to redress the grievances of the Palestinians and other aggrieved people in the Middle East and elsewhere in accordance with international law, peace would remain elusive forcing the US to fight the fictional windmill.

What the US should do now to gain respect not fear of the Muslims in general and Arabs in particular is by placing its "Road Map" on the table. Meanwhile, it must withdraw from Iraq within a couple of months by apologising to the Iraqis for the deaths and suffering caused by the attack. The US must also grab the Syrian proposal to make the Middle East WMD free as soon as possible. There is no point in evading the question about Israel's WMD (including the nuclear ones), as Colin Powell did quite amateurishly during his press briefing on April the 15th.

The US must not translate Huntingtonian "Clash of Civilizations" into reality by antagonising the Muslim and the so-called Confucian worlds by posing threats of "preemptive" attacks. No peace-loving and civilized person in the East and the West want more Nine-Elevens or "preemptive" attacks in the name of freedom and democracy. We do not want the US to answer the question posed by Canadian Prime Minister, Jean Chretien, by naming a country or two. After George Bush had insisted on "regime change" in Iraq by violent means, Chretien raised the question in disgust: "Who is next? Give me the list."

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How the first Earth Day came about

BILLY I AHMED

TODAY, April 22, people across the world will be observing Earth Day registering their concern about deteriorating state of environment and pronouncing resolve to arrest the detrimental trend.

On April 22, 1970, Earth Day was first observed in the USA. It was, "one of the most remarkable happenings in the history of democracy . . ." commented the American Heritage Magazine, in its October 1993 issue.

What is the purpose of Earth Day? How did it start? These are the questions most frequently asked. Actually, the idea for Earth Day evolved over a period of seven years starting in 1962. For several years, it had been troubling Senator Gaylord Nelson that the state of US environment was simply a non-issue in the politics of the country. Finally, in November 1962, an idea occurred to Nelson that was, he thought, a virtual cinch to put the environment into the political "limelight" once and for all. The idea was to persuade President Kennedy to give visibility to this issue by going on a national conservation tour. He flew to Washington to discuss the proposal with Attorney General Robert Kennedy, who liked the idea. So did the President. The President began his five-day, eleven-state conservation tour in September 1963. For many reasons the tour did not succeed in putting the issue onto the national political agenda. However, it was the germ of the idea that ultimately flowered into Earth Day.

Nelson, continued to speak on environmental issues to a variety of audiences in some twenty-five states. All across US, evidence of environmental degradation was appearing everywhere, and everyone noticed except the political establishment. The environmental issue simply was not to be found on the nation's political agenda. The people were concerned, but the politicians were not.

Six years had passed before the idea that became Earth Day occurred to Senator Nelson, while on a conservation speaking tour out West in the summer of 1969. At the time, anti-Vietnam War demonstrations, called "teach-ins," had spread to college campuses all across US. Nelson took this opportunity -- why not organise a huge grassroots protest over what was happening to our environment?

He was convinced that if he could tap in the environmental concerns of the general public and infuse the students' anti-war energy into the environmental cause, he could generate a demonstration that would force this issue onto the political agenda. It was a big gamble, but worth a try.

Then, at a conference in Seattle in September 1969, he announced that in the spring of 1970 there would be a nationwide grassroots demonstration on behalf of the environment and invited everyone to participate. The wire services carried the story from coast to coast. The response was electrifying. It took off like gangbusters. Telegrams, letters, and telephone inquiries poured in from all across the country. The American people finally had a forum to express concern about what was happening to the land, rivers, lakes, and air -- and they did so with spectacular exuberance. For the next four months, two members of his Senate staff, Linda Billings and John Heritage, managed Earth Day affairs out of his Senate office.

Five months before Earth Day, on Sunday, November 30, 1969, *The New York Times* carried a lengthy article by Gladwin Hill reporting on the astonishing proliferation of environmental events: "Rising concern about the environmental crisis."

Billy I Ahmed is a researcher



After the gravediggers return to dust...

There are people all over Japan, just like everywhere else in our mother earth, who are trying to keep the decency of their heart by upholding the truth in a way that might turn out to be meaningful. Japanese playwright and actress Eriko Watanabe no doubt belongs to that category. She has recently published an opinionated piece in Japan's leading daily Asahi Shimbun, where she called upon the people of Japan not to hesitate to show their strong anti-war sentiment, writes Monzurul Huq from Tokyo.

AS the dogs of war are still barking across the shattered cities and oilfields across Iraq, the voice against war and destruction seems to be giving up to the new emerging reality that has been shaped by the powerful force of visual media around the world. Saddam Hussein no longer stands as a hero, but turned out to be a tragic fugitive discarded even by his closest relatives and desperately trying to find a place for hiding in our cramped and hollow earth. The 'liberators', on the other hand, find a sadistic solace by letting lose their gangs of looters who under the protection of heavily armed

Watanabe is not known for having any strong political commitment. She thinks of herself keeping a safe distance from political action. But the war in Iraq compelled her to think about remaining indifferent at the time of crisis. She still thinks theatre should not be turned into a medium for political assertions. However, when war becomes the issue, she is not hesitant to change that position... "We theatricals are keeping alive a 3,000-year history and tradition. And our precursors are telling us this: Give voice to words that will dig deep into the souls of people, not words that will fill the house. Speak lines that will live forever, even after the gravedigger himself has returned to dust."

Texan gung-hoes systematically destroy the remains of historical and cultural legacies of a nation tracing back to thousands of years. This is probably a natural outcome when a nation without its own history, other than that of getting rid of everything

that existed within its own territorial borders before the arrival of new masters, takes control of the world; and also a stark reminder of what lies ahead of us in coming days.

As the victors are too busy deciding who is to get which slice of the greater loot of a country that has been subjugated and cowed down, a deep sigh of silence reign the other end of equation where the voice of reason is supposed to have its own foothold. The much talked about Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD), which were repeatedly sighted and highlighted by the new media emperors known worldwide by their simple abbreviations of CNN and BBC as the logic behind waging an all out assault against a sovereign state, have so far nowhere been found. As if WMD have also gone deep underground like Saddam himself.

We shouldn't forget the fact that the new imperial power that waged war against Iraq wasn't ready to allow the United Nations to extend its search for Iraq's 'hidden weapons' even for one single week. Now almost five weeks have passed since the naked invasion. After failing to locate anything similar to that of deadly poison gas or destructive nuclear device, the new masters have eventually come up with a new terminology in the name of 'sanctions busting' that they claim is equally dangerous as the WMD. Sanctions busting, as some of us might remember, is nothing new and was widely practiced by the predecessors of the new masters in the process of helping their client regime in apartheid South Africa. If Saddam is

to be accused and blamed for busting the UN sanctions, the same should also apply to the father of the present US president and a few others who are still alive and kicking. But ironically justice always follows the dictates of victors and here also we are not supposed to expect any exception.

The strong voice against war that sounded loud and clear throughout the period of bombing and burning of Iraq has somehow fallen silent in Japan since the day US marines were seen moving all over Baghdad. People, even those who were on the streets a few days ago, seem to have accepted the new reality as irony of fate and decided to maintain a low-profile at a difficult time when the emperors of TV screens are heralding tirelessly the emergence of an era of reason and justice. But that clear voice of rightful dissent has obviously not gone all in vein.

There are people all over Japan, just like everywhere else in our mother earth, who are trying to keep the decency of their heart by upholding the truth in a way that might turn out to be meaningful. Japanese playwright and actress Eriko Watanabe no doubt belongs to that category. She has recently published an opinionated piece in Japan's leading daily Asahi Shimbun, where she called upon the people of Japan not to hesitate to show their strong anti-war sentiment.

The day US forces launched attack against Iraq, Eriko Watanabe along with a friend from the world of theatre rushed to the official residence of the prime minister to request him not to

support the war. As the security guards at the gate stopped them, she insisted that she should be allowed at least to leave a message for the prime minister, and the security staff granted the request.

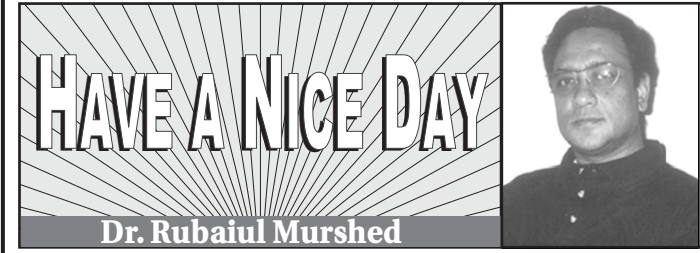
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As the wind of war started to blow around the deserts of Iraq from late January, Eriko Watanabe and a number of fellow travelers in Japanese theatre started to think what they could do to oppose the coming war. This resulted in a script written jointly for dramatic reading, which was first performed on February 28 at a Tokyo hall and was repeated later in early April. More than forty theatre personalities participated in the performance that they have named "We are not giving up -- the theatre can empower people not to wage war."

Watanabe rightfully thinks that no immediate result of the effort should be expected, despite being upbeat that in the long run it will have its impact on those to whom the script is directed. In international politics where raw violence and power play dominate, she considers the people associated with theatre, having only bodies and words to utter, to be pathetically helpless creatures. But

she is also convinced that repeating the message would eventually allow it gaining the power to help bring change not only in Japanese society, but the whole world too. No wonder as the script contains such strong appeal:

"We theatricals are keeping alive a 3,000-year history and tradition. And our precursors are telling us this: Give voice to words that will dig deep into the souls of people, not words that will fill the house. Speak lines that will live forever, even after the gravedigger himself has returned to dust."



All health information to keep you up to date

How safe is your weight?

Generally speaking overweight is defined as a condition in which an individual's weight is ten to twenty percent greater than the acceptable range. In the vast majority of cases, overweight it caused by consuming more calories than are needed to maintain normal weight. The health risks of obesity are increased if either one or both parents are obese. According to some researchers, a number of nutritional factors including the balance of vitamins, minerals and essential fatty acids may influence the activity and metabolism of fat. In fine, if you are overweight or obese, it is desirable for you to lose weight either for cosmetic reasons or because of an associated medical problem.

Did you know?
Men lose about 40 hairs per day and women lose about 70 hairs per day.

