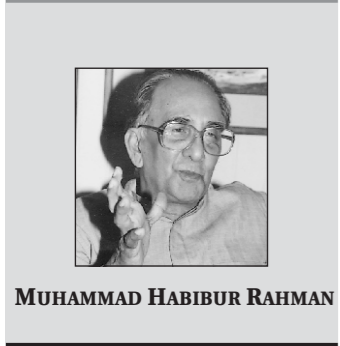


Tagore and his "Crisis in Civilization"



MUHAMMAD HABIBUR RAHMAN

into socialized tyranny.

"During my boyhood days the attitude of the cultured and educated section of Bengal, nurtured on English learning was charged with a feeling of revolt against these rigid regulations of society... In place of these set codes of conduct was accepted the ideal of 'civilization' as represented by the English term."

For about fifty years on different occasions Tagore reflected and wrote on civilisation. He used English and European civilisations interchangeably. He did that with regard to Hindu and Indian civilisations. He was aware that Indian civilization ignored the study of nature. Tagore thought that Asian civilization had got a saving role to play in the world. He did not like American way of life. He was against bigoted nationalism and machine oriented culture. He knew that by eating little, wearing little, learning little, the neglected proletariat were serving all, and that they laboured most, but for them was the most ignominy. They are the lampshade of civilization. They stand carrying the lamp on their head and everybody gets the light from the top, but the oil of the lamp flows down their bodies. He welcomed the advent of the women in the civilization-making job and hoped that they would be good counterpoise to male chauvinism.

On 14 April, Bengali New Year, 1941 Tagore's 'Shabhyatar Shankar' (Crisis in Civilization), a sort of final testament, was read out at Shantiniketan in his presence.

Tagore began his address with compliments to the great English minds: "It was mainly through their mighty literature that we formed our ideas with regard to these newcomers to our Indian shores. We had not lost faith in the generosity of the English race. I was impressed by this evidence of liberal humanity in the character of the English and thus I was led to set them on the pedestal of my highest respect. The large-hearted, radical liberalism of those speeches. English literature which nourished our minds in the past, does even now convey its deep resonance to the recesses of our heart."

But unfortunately to Tagore it was "a tragic tale of the gradual loss of my faith in the claims of the European nations to civilization." Tagore severely criticized the British rule in India: "The wheels of Fate will some day compel the British to give up their Indian Empire. But what kind of India will they leave behind, what stark misery? When the stream of their two centuries' administration runs dry at last, what a waste of mud and filth will they leave behind them! I had at one time believed that the

spring of civilization would issue out of the heart of Europe. But today, when I am about to quit the world, that faith has deserted me."

Tagore said, "It is the mission of civilization to bring unity among people and establish peace and harmony. But in unfortunate India the social fabric is being rent into shreds by unseemly outburst of hooliganism daily growing in intensity, right under the very aegis of 'law and order'."

He further stated that, "the demon of barbarity has given up all pretence and has emerged with unconcealed fangs, ready to tear up humanity in an orgy of devastation. From one end of the world to the other the poisonous fumes of hatred darken the atmosphere. The spirit of violence which perhaps lay dormant in the psychology of the West, has at last roused itself and desecrates the spirit of

A Million Multinies November (1990): "It was an old man's melancholy farewell to the world. Five years later the war was over. Europe began to heal; in the second half of the century Europe and the West were to be stronger and more creative and more influential than they have ever been. The calamity Tagore hadn't seen was the calamity that was to come to Calcutta."

The ten paragraphed essay contains about eighteen hundred words. It appears to me to be a sown song of the poet. It contains sighs of his unrequited love for his masters.

Tagore was not a good judge of events. While criticizing his British masters he heaped praise on the Soviet Union. "Her civilization is free from all invidious distinction between one class and another, between one sect and another". He

kind and the dominant source of conflict will be cultural. Nations states will remain the most powerful actors in world affairs, but the principal conflicts of global politics will occur between nations and groups of different civilizations. The clash of civilizations will dominate global politics. The fault lines between civilizations will be the battle lines of the future."

The left is however dreaming of changing the unsatisfactory condition of human life. In 2001 Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri wrote in the preface of their book, *Empire*, "The Empire we are faced with wields enormous powers of oppression and destruction... The passage to Empire and its process of globalization offer new possibilities to the forces of liberation... The multitude will have to invent new democratic forms and a new constituent power that will one day

take us through and beyond Empire." The authors have thus joyously concluded: "Once again in postmodernity we find ourselves in Francis's situation, posing against the misery of power the joy of being. This is a revolution that no power will control... because biopower and communism, cooperation and revolution remain together, in love, simplicity, and also innocence. This is the irrepressible lightness and joy of being communist."

Civilization is a critical condition. It is all the time carrying in its bosom a crisis and like a mirror reflects social tensions.

In the beginning of the twentieth century Rabindranath Tagore, Nazrul Islam and many other visionaries had the millennium illusion. In 1911 Norman Angell wrote in *The Great Illusion* that war was now impossible because economic integration meant that the people were too dependent on each other to bother with such archaic evils. The next few decades saw two world wars and various kinds of totalitarianism.

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Man."

Tagore concluded: "And yet I shall not commit the grievous sin of losing faith in Man. I would rather look forward to the opening of a new chapter in his history after the cataclysm is over and the atmosphere rendered clean with the spirit of service and sacrifice. Perhaps that dawn will come from this horizon, from the East where the sun rises. A day will come when unvanquished Man will retrace his path of conquest, despite all barriers, to win back his lost human heritage."

The speech was ended with Tagore's favourite quotation from Sanskrit: "By unrighteousness man prospers, gains what appears desirable, conquers enemies, but perishes at the root."

Krishna Dutta and Andrew Robinson said "Crisis in Civilization is easy to dismiss. It is definitely not among Tagore's finest and most lasting essays. Hardly anyone, looking to the state of either India, China or Japan today, can have any confidence that they will create a more humane civilization as Rabindranath hoped. But the very forcefulness of the essay's language, coming from a man of Tagore's worldwide experience, sensitivity and imagination, compels a response."

V.S. Naipaul wrote of it in India:

contrasted the Soviet Union's progress with India's 'disorder of barbarism' and described the two systems of government, 'one based on cooperation' (the Soviet Union), 'the other on exploitation (India).

Little did he know that the Soviet Union would abjectly fall before the end of the twentieth century without any blow from outside and there would be little nostalgia for the same amongst the Bolsheviks. Curiously enough Tagore did not make any reference to the U.S.A.

It will be futile to look forward to a saviour. Tagore thought the deliverance would come from the East. His bias for the East is obvious. All the criticisms Tagore against the British can very well be made against the present set-up in South Asia. The Bharat Tirtha... The Indian pilgrimage... does not inspire. It has been described as the Continent of Circe by Nirod.C. Chowdhury.

Presently our human civilization is facing many a crisis and responses are also variant. The conservative right appears to be on warpath. Samuel P. Huntington said in *The Clash of Civilizations* "that the fundamental source of the new world will not be primarily ideological or primarily economic. The great divisions among human-

take us through and beyond Empire." The authors have thus joyously concluded: "Once again in postmodernity we find ourselves in Francis's situation, posing against the misery of power the joy of being. This is a revolution that no power will control... because biopower and communism, cooperation and revolution remain together, in love, simplicity, and also innocence. This is the irrepressible lightness and joy of being communist."

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The great information age is still evolving. Many an imponderability appears to be waiting for us in the future.

Muhammad Habibur Rahman is former Chief Justice and head of caretaker government

Lest we forget

Khan Bahadur Moulvi Mohammad Ismail

The man and the father

M ASAFUDDOWLAH

I find it nearly impossible to write on someone who is my own father. I am disturbed by his austerity, upset by his mercurial temper, overwhelmed by his honesty, awed by his character, grateful for the attention he paid to us and finally surrender my eyes to tears when I recall his intense love. Today is his twenty second death anniversary.

Khan Bahadur Moulvi Mohammad Ismail was born in Faridpur on the first day of Baishakh, 1300 BS. He would have been 110 years old, had he lived. He was born into a family of great wealth. His forefathers came from the Khorasan province of Iran. My mother, Begum Kawkabannasa was a lady of great piety and religious knowledge.

Her eldest daughter Mariam Begum was a pioneer of printing Saris. She was the founder of 'Rupayan'. She also was the technical advisor of the women's self-help project under the Ministry of Youth. She was the senior-most Member of the 1996-2001 Parliament. Their second daughter Shamsunnahar Begum was also a Member of the Parliament. Their third daughter is Firoza Begum, the legend of Nazrul Sangeet across Bengal. The fourth daughter Rizia Begum was one of the senior business entrepreneurs of the country. Their first son retired as a Brigadier General of the Bangladesh Army. He commanded the Independent Engineer Brigade, was a Defence Advisor in Saudi Arabia and Chairman, Chittagong Development Authority. Their second son M Anis Ud Dowla, is the Chairman and Managing Director, ACI. He had been a former President of the MCC and the Employer's Association. I happen to be their youngest son.

Khan Bahadur Ismail was President of Faridpur Lawyer's Bar and of the Muslim League for a few decades. At the time of his death, he was the senior most advocate of the Supreme Court. His court arguments and repertoires were considered quotables. His contributions and sacrifices for the liberation of Indian Muslims under the banner of Muslim League is still gratefully acknowledge by those who knew him. He founded the 'Fouj-e-Islam'. He was one of the founders of the Anjuman-e-

Mufidul Islam of Calcutta. He was closely associated with Sir Nasim, CR Das, Sir Nazimuddin and AK Fazlul Huq.

I am not writing this epilogue to introduce him as a political personality, a famous lawyer or as a philanthropist. I am only trying to narrate a father. His anger, unhappiness, reprimands were all intended for our good, for our upgradation as human beings and as Muslims. It is so difficult to assess a father, who was our guardian and our philosopher. As times it seems to be an act of impropriety for children to adjudge their earthly creator, their eternal mentor. The relationship between a



Late Khan Bahadur Moulvi Mohammad Ismail

father and a son is special, so exclusive that to speak about it in public seems to be doing something he would not have approved of.

He taught us the courage to speak out. He used to say, "silence is fraud where it is duty to speak". He laid stress on nothing more than honest living. He hated nothing more than deceit. He never bowed before a court. He discarded all cases that appeared to him to be false. He never raised his voice with our mother during the 74 years of their married life. He never raised his hands on his daughters. He never interfered with our options. He only guided. He only repeated from the Quran and the Hadis to tell us what was right and what was wrong. He constantly tried to have all his children say their prayers with him -- particularly the Maghrib prayer I have never heard him lie. His leisure was only in prayers or in

unending recitation of "Darud Sharif" on the prophet. We could understand that by reading his lips.

Where and how to begin the epic of a father that he was? His bespectacled face had short white beard and an inevitable white cap, starched and slanted, and a black gown fluttering like the wings of a black bird. His voice was of deep baritone. My father was a man of few words. "Not affluence but style", "simple living and his thinking", "life is nothing but a bundle of duties", "Now or never" were his often pronounced adages. He said, "When present looks continuously worse than the past, a disastrous future is holding out for you".

He also said, "when power falls in the hands of the small and the mean, society and nation will ruefully regret". He used to say that, "the 'Darud Sharif' is like an armour; wear it all the time, you won't be hurt." He said, "half of truth is the darkest of lies." He would often repeat, do not ask for anything from another man". Were do I begin and where do I end this epic? He was strong and a disciplinarian of the toughest make. I have never seen him cry except once after he had performed the Hajj when he said, "I now have the honour to have paid my homage to my ideal, who is also my path-finder".

His life was the life of an ascetic. For one spelling error he would administer ten lashes with Burmese cane. But at midnight he would quietly put Zambuk on the wound and a drop of saline water would suddenly put the wound on fire during my pretension of deep sleep. He used to say that "do not keep quoting from the Hadis, translate just one in your life. You will be far better off than those who quote him but do not follow his teachings."

In all the seven brothers and sisters should you perchance notice one admirable quality, it would be our inheritance from him, and when you detect the many wrongs, these are our own acquisitions. We seek his forgiveness for our failure to be what he wanted us to become.

We cannot tell him "good bye". It is not possible for us to take leave from him. He is attached to us like soul to a body, like tears to the eyes.

M Asafuddowla, a former Secretary, is Editor of the Bangladesh Today.

Was removing Saddam Hussein really worth it?

JOHN L. BARKDULL AND RON CHEPESIUK

THE media in Bangladesh has consumed barrels of ink debating whether the United States had legal justification to invade Iraq. As many analysts have shown, the legal case for the US invasion and occupation is tenuous, at best. No credible evidence of weapons of mass destruction was offered beforehand, and none has been forthcoming since the fall of Saddam Hussein. Moreover, it is ludicrous for the US to claim it was enforcing UN resolutions when the UN itself strongly opposed such enforcement.

But the Bush administration has been quite clear in saying that the law or UN mandates are not binding when it considers its vital interests to be at stake. Indeed, the Bush administration is full of individuals in the mould of Donald Rumsfeld and Paul Wolfowitz who consider themselves to be tough-minded realists, willing to use all forms of power to pursue US national interests. For these statesmen, legality and morality are little more than peripheral issues in the realist world of power politics. The refusal of the United Nations to endorse the invasion, the violations of the UN Charter the US incurred by pursuing war, the human toll extracted to carry out its policy -- none of these developments altered the Bush administration's single minded pursuit of war against Iraq.

But with the end of the Iraq War, a big question remains -- Did the Bush administration really further the US's national interest by flaunting international law and ignoring world public opinion? What were the gains and what were the losses? The Iraq War made America feel good, and it has boosted Bush's popularity, but what will be the long-term impact on U.S. national interests?

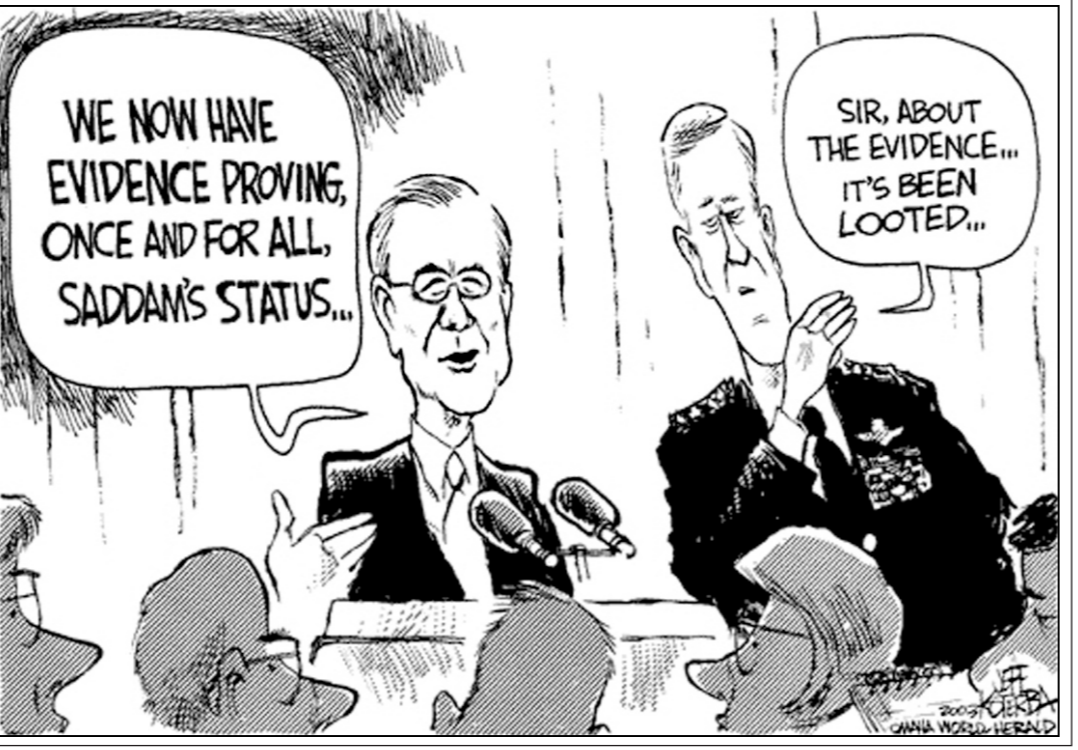
President Bush has just declared the Iraq war over, so it's a good time to take a hard look at the ledger. In assessing the Iraq War, the Bush administration can count the following developments as gains for US foreign policy:

- λ In pursuit of the War on Terrorism, the US sent troops to the former Soviet republics, as well as Afghanistan and Pakistan. Now, with troops in Iraq, the US has a military presence extending across Central Asia and the Middle East. Iran and Syria are now the only states in the region with no US military presence. These countries have resisted US influence in the region, but they are now both virtually surrounded by that influ-

ence. They may not be next on the Uncle Sam's hit list, as so many have speculated, but they, no doubt, feel far more vulnerable, and this should make them more compliant as the U.S. pursues its interests in the region.

- λ Contrary to what many analysts have contended, the U.S. has no overriding economic interest in Iraqi oil. The U.S. doesn't need Iraqi oil to fuel its own economy, and it certainly didn't need to invade Iraq to ensure its access to Iraq's oil. It has many sources of oil, as well as many alternative energy sources, and plenty of room to conserve energy in times of shortage. The United States is powerful because it is not dependent on any single resource or source of supply, whereas the countries the United States might want to influence -- Iran, Russia, Saudi Arabia, for instance -- do have a lot depending on the oil market.
- λ But the fact is the Iraqi oil constitutes the world's second largest reserves, and it is now under US management. This gives the superpower the ability to influence Iraqi oil production levels, which will give it a powerful leverage over the world price. This will also translate into political power as well as economic influence.
- λ Thanks to the Iraq War, Israel, America's leading ally in the Middle East, now has the ability to pressure Syria and Iran, a development that now gives it the upper hand in Israeli-Arab relations. Feeling more vulnerable, Syria might be more inclined to negotiate a settlement regarding the Golan Heights.
- λ Israel's influence in Lebanon, moreover, will also increase. US sabre-rattling against Syria has already included a call for Syrian troops to withdraw from Lebanon. No doubt, Iraq will fill the vacuum, if that happens.
- λ Also, the United States has called on Syria to stop supporting Hezbollah, which has played a major part in driving Israel from Lebanon and continues to pose a challenge on Israel's northern border. If Syria continues to support the organisation, it may face military pressure from the east, along a border that once was secure. Removing Hezbollah's influence would undoubtedly make the Israeli settlement process easier to execute.
- λ The United States has increased its ability to pursue military and intelligence activity in the war on terrorism. Saddam Hussein was probably not involved in the September 11 attack, and there is no real evidence (the British *Independent* newspaper's curious document find notwithstanding)

The United States has an interest in a strong world economy. The Invasion of Iraq has sent the world economy into nosedive. The United States has an interest in reducing the prevalence and spread of terrorism. The invasion of Iraq will create a hundred Bin Ladens. The United States has an interest in the peacefully settling disputes. The invasion of Iraq has marginalised the United Nations, the main forum for such peaceful settlement. The United States has an interest in halting the spread of weapons. The invasion of Iraq didn't do that because Iraq had no significant weapons programmes, and now other countries have good reason to expand their arsenals.



that his regime was connected to Al Qaeda.

- λ Nonetheless, an Iraq largely closed to US intelligence and law enforcement could have provided a safe haven for anti-American terrorists. Further, opening the country up is bound to yield considerable information about terrorist activities that otherwise would be unavailable. Yes, killing thousands of Iraqi civilians to make this gain isn't legally or morally justified, but in the tooth and claw world of national security, American policy makers will consider this development to be in the US's national interest.
- λ In the larger scheme of things, it's possible that the United States will be able to incorporate a transformed Middle East into a US-led global world order. Despite all the pious and self-righteous statements of the Bush administration about making the world safer for democracy, its strategic goal is quite clear: to attain by any means

necessary a US-dominated global order compatible with American values and interests. No potential rival to US leadership in this system will be allowed to emerge, international law notwithstanding. Saddam Hussein was a big obstacle to attaining that objective and now he's disappeared.

- λ Yet, one hesitates to say this new regional order will be democratic or free. Probably, Latin America of the 1960s, not Western Europe, is the implicit model. That is, the United States will be more than content with a series of authoritarian regimes, their police and military trained and armed by the United States, which are unwavering in their adherence to US policy. Deviations, predictably, will result in palace coups (Chile and Guatemala, for example) and direct interventions (the removal of Manuel Noriega from Panama, for instance) will be undertaken when needed. As for Iraq, democracy is not likely because the Iraqi people

clearly want the occupying troops to leave and don't want their oil controlled by Western global corporations.

- λ So, initially, at least, the US can claim some substantial gains from the ousting of Saddam Hussein. But we stress "initially, at least," for serious questions remain about the wisdom of US action in Iraq and the long-term impact of the Bush administration's pursuit of what it considers to be the US's national interest. Moreover, even if one accepts that the national interest should be the only guide for foreign policy conduct, it's not at all clear that Bush administration's policy serves the long-term American national interest. Another look at the ledger will confirm our conclusion:
- λ First, the Iraq War wasn't really worth the cost. President Bush had to request \$70 billion to carry on the conflict, from an already strained U.S. budget and now governing Iraq seems likely to

prove more difficult than conquering it. The US will have to pour billions of more dollars into Iraq reconstruction, and the longer the US stays in the country, the more the Iraqi people will resent its presence and the more difficult it will be for Uncle Sam to portray itself as a liberating force.

Bush has talked about rebuilding schools in Iraq, but plenty of schools in the U.S. need rebuilding. George Bush, Jr. must be careful that he doesn't make the same mistake his father did in the 1992 election.

- λ The U.S. has lost on the diplomatic front as well. To achieve its objectives against a helpless opponent, the United States alienated traditional allies, squandered all the good will it had received from September 11, threatened to destabilise friendly governments, lost credibility in international forums, and may well have spurred insecure nations such as North Korea to acquire weapons of mass destruction as fast as they can.
- λ We also need to consider the impact on the world economy, which continues to suffer due to the uncertainties created by the war. We once believe that war was good for business, but in today's global economy, we see that war unsettles investors and disrupts trade and financial markets. The market may be settling down now that Saddam Hussein is gone, but renewed American threats against Syria, Iran, North Korea, Cuba and others could harm economic growth for years to come.
- λ Historically, the United States has relied on international cooperation to pursue many goals in the world. Fighting the war on drugs, controlling transnational crime and immigration, protecting intellectual property and the environment, and many other important international pursuits could be damaged as other countries pull back from entanglement with an unpredictable superpower.
- λ The United States has premised its security since World War II on the NATO alliance and a worldwide network of bilateral relationships. But lacking a reasonable solution to the Bush administration's go-it-

alone approach to international relations, other large nations are feeling compelled to join together to protect their interests against American power. France, Germany, and Russia, for instance, have moved toward forming an alternative security relationship intended explicitly to contain American unilateral power.

Tony Blair deplores this development, but his solution is silly -- to prevent American unilateralism, the rest of the world must go along with American demands. The Bush administration policy of throwing away enduring security relationships then is having the perverse effect of creating the rival power blocs US policy ostensibly wants to avoid. If the United States continues on this course, it will one day face the choice of military confrontation with new rivals with much more capability than Iraq, or withdrawing into a new isolationism.

Institutions, once destroyed, are not easily rebuilt. Prudent policy would mandate that the U.S. maintain hard-won friendships, but the Bush administration has no intention of doing so.

So in no way can the Bush administration claim that the gains from the War with Iraq clearly outweigh the costs. The truth is the U.S. has paid and will continue to pay a high price for conquering a country already among the world's weakest, least able to resist, and lacking international legitimacy.

As American citizens we are proud that our country at its best has stood for the highest human aspirations -- democracy, freedom, rule of law, respect for human rights, fairness. In the past, American preponderance has depended in large measure on American moral leadership.

But we are realists as well who don't want to idealise US behaviour. Historically the United States has engaged in covert operations against other governments, used raw military power in too many cases, and manipulated international organisations and international law.

Nevertheless, the Bush administration's open disregard for world opinion, its declared intention to ignore the constraints of international law and morality, and its disregard for the interests or principles of other nations mark a disturbing new chapter in American foreign policy.

The sad fact -- as a result of the Iraq War, the Bush administration has squandered America's moral leadership, and without moral legitimacy, the United States lacks the military muscle to achieve its foreign policy goals. This loss of

legitimacy is bound to affect the home front as well. If the United States tries to substitute military power for negotiation and fair play, then it must be ready to pay an increasingly steep price in terms of its long-term national interest.

The American people were successfully persuaded that the war against Iraq was a good cause, but they were not forced to examine Bush policy very closely. That's because the body count was low and the duration of the conflict short. Against a more determined and formidable enemy in the future, many more American soldiers will die and suffer. Americans will begin asking why. Unless good answers are forthcoming, support for military action will evaporate.

The Bush administration doesn't seem to realise that United States cannot do whatever it wants without paying a significant price. The reality -- the world no longer operates according to the old realist rules. All countries, including the United States, are enmeshed in a global network of political, social, and economic relations that are quite beneficial and highly costly to disrupt. The multilateral organisations, trade arrangements, financial markets, communications networks, and the like that now characterise global society depend on orderly behaviour by all actors, including the sole remaining superpower. The Bush administration fancies itself revolutionary, forward-thinking, and bold. In fact, they are bound to a worn and anachronistic worldview that can only lead to a disastrous foreign policy.

The United States has an interest in a strong world economy. The Invasion of Iraq has sent the world economy into nosedive. The United States has an interest in reducing the prevalence and spread of terrorism. The invasion of Iraq will create a hundred Bin Ladens. The United States has an interest in the peacefully settling disputes. The invasion of Iraq has marginalised the United Nations, the main forum for such peaceful settlement. The United States has an interest in halting the spread of weapons. The invasion of Iraq didn't do that because Iraq had no significant weapons programmes, and now other countries have good reason to expand their arsenals. Let's hope and pray for regime change in Washington in 2004. That will be in the best long-term interest of not just the US but also the international community.

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