

Political fall-out of Iraq war on Britain



M. M. REZAUL KARIM

THE news of the resignation of Britain's International Development Minister Clare Short from the cabinet did not come as a total surprise. Ms. Short was the first front-ranking cabinet Minister to have publicly criticized Prime Minister Tony Blair's strong and consistent support for US President's decision to wage war on Iraq. Such public criticism of a cabinet Minister is generally followed by the critic's resignation from the cabinet. Short did not resign, but others, including former Foreign Secretary Robin Cook, did.

Why was it so? Why she did not resign then after hitting banner headlines in media? It was mainly because of the pledge made by the Prime Minister to the effect that no force would be used without a UN mandate to retrieve weapons of mass destruction from the Iraqi

regime of Saddam Hossain. That apparently assuaged Clare Short temporarily. But despite the failure of obtaining the requisite Security Council resolution specifically authorizing use of force in Iraq, Tony Blair went along President Bush by a convenient interpretation of the Security Council Resolution No.1441. That the phrase

was difficult to comprehend how she eschewed her original posture. However, the explanation forwarded by her at the time of resignation somewhat cleared the position. She evidently was assured by the Prime Minister that following conclusion of the war, Britain in general and Short in particular would have a significant

Blair has now been totally exposed. He sent British warships, troops and aircraft to the projected scenes of war almost simultaneously with the similar action taken by the US administration. The Parliament was told that the action was preparatory to a possible action in the Gulf and that such action would be taken after securing consent of the

already declared that another resolution was not pre-requisite for going into action in Iraq.

The other dismal failure of Tony Blair has been manifested in devising the principal role of the United Nations. Tony Blair's loud and consistent advocacy for assigning the legitimate central role of the United Nations to shape the politi-

this account. However, the interests and compulsions of US British "special" relations rescued, for the second time, a public cleavage between the two traditional friends across the Atlantic.

Clare Short's resignation heralds a bad omen for Tony Blair. The latter, indeed, secured Parliamentary approval for going to war. But it was so done at a price. The exercise not only led to a revolt of over 120 fellow Labour MPs, but made the Prime Minister depend on the opposition Conservatives for a clear and comfortable endorsement of the war. The overwhelming majority of British population, 70 per cent and over, as well as the clergy and the intellectuals in particular, had manifested their bitter opposition against the war. Tony Blair may seek to salvage the situation and arrest his downward popularity by ensuring for Britain a sizeable chunk in the juicy cake of Iraq's post-war scenario. But, it appears that too much damages have already been inflicted on the Labour Party to retrieve its past position in the next general election. And the ever vigilant Gordon Brown, Chancellor of the Exchequer, is increasingly making his presence felt on the wings, ready to pounce on Labour leadership as and when the opportunity arises.

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Dr. Rubaiul Murshed

All health information to keep you up to date

Around the world

UK HIV rate up 25 per cent

The number of people infected with the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) has gone up by a "disturbing" 25 per cent in a year in Britain, the Public Health Laboratory Service announced.

At the end of September, 2,945 people were recorded as having contracted HIV, last year, against 2,354 in the same period of 2001, the PHLS said.

"We were very concerned last year when we saw a record number of new HIV diagnoses but these latest figures are even more disturbing," the service's director Dr Kevin Fenton said. According to the latest figures, about 41,000 people have HIV, which causes AIDS. Junior health minister Hazel Blears also described the figures as very disturbing as she announced a new health campaign to promote safe sex.

"This is a very serious issue for us, and that's why today we are launching a big sexual health campaign trying to encourage people to adopt safe sex," she said on BBC radio.

"It is a specific campaign aimed mainly at people aged 18 to 30 and we're really encouraging people to use condoms," she explained. "It is vital that we start once again to educate people about the importance of practising safer sex," she added.

The level of infection is the highest among homosexuals, at about 1,500 new cases of HIV every year.

The report also noted an increase in other sexually transmitted diseases, notably syphilis, which has quadrupled in six years.

Did you know?

A study done in the early 1990s in the USA showed that the number of fecal bacteria in a hotel bathroom doubled when the room cost less than \$40 per night.

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CURRENTS AND CROSSCURRENTS

Tony Blair may seek to salvage the situation and arrest his downward popularity by ensuring for Britain a sizeable chunk in the juicy cake of Iraq's post-war scenario. But, it appears that too much damages have already been inflicted on the Labour Party to retrieve its past position in the next general election. And the ever vigilant Gordon Brown, Chancellor of the Exchequer, is increasingly making his presence felt on the wings, ready to pounce on Labour leadership as and when the opportunity arises.

"serious consequences" could be analogous to an all-out invasion of a sovereign independent nation was demonstrated for the first time in recent history.

Clare Short still did not resign. She was persuaded to stay on. I had the opportunity of knowing her personally during my diplomatic sojourn in London over a decade ago. She was a highly spirited, strong and progressive front-bencher of the Labour Party and was quite outspoken. She had liberal viewpoints and was sympathetic to the developing world. It

role to play in Iraq's post-war UN-sponsored pivotal rehabilitation and reconstruction efforts in Iraq. Prime Minister's office denied the allegation of having made any such promise. However, with the apparent failure of the United Nations to be able to undertake the principal role in the vast and delicate political and economic rehabilitation of Iraq, in total disregard to the vociferous demand even of Tony Blair, Clare Short found no alternative than to take the drastic action as she did.

The role of Prime Minister Tony

UN and the international community. People strongly suspect Blair had already pledged to Bush to go whole hog with the latter's plan and action on Iraq. However, to be fair to Blair, he, no doubt, sincerely tried to secure a Security Council's enabling resolution to render legitimacy to armed action in Iraq. He even traveled far and wide to advocate war and to that effect acted almost like an emissary of the US President. Yet, the Anglo-US axis failed to muster enough support at the UN but, to be on the safe side, the American President had

cal and economic future of Iraq has been totally, if not ignominiously, cast aside by the US President. It is difficult to assume that on this issue also Blair could not blare without obtaining some positive indication from President Bush. But the US President reneged. Blair also went to the extent of suggesting that oil revenues in post-war Iraq would be kept in a special fund, an escrow account, to be used only for the people of Iraq. This is, perhaps, being done, but the victors instead of the United Nations are expected to operate

A humongous mistake!

Dr. FAKHRUDDIN AHMED writes from Princeton

THESE days, if one browses the Iraq-related news items in the America press and the world press, one gets the impression that two different wars are being discussed! The world views Bush's America as a renegade superpower bent on imposing its military might on its weaker enemies with a view to enhancing its own power, pumping up its anemic economy with Iraqi oil, and throwing bread crumbs at its "coalition partners," such as Britain and Poland, while making Israel's mass murderer Sharon more and more secure by destroying Israel's enemies. In America, the war has been a colossal hit, President Bush is the next best thing to apple pie for waging the war unilaterally bypassing the UN, and the likes of the Dixie Chicks are traitors for having the gall to criticise the almighty Prez! The only way the Dixie Chicks could regain their popularity was by exposing their shame on the cover of *Entertainment Weekly*.

What about the shame of others, such as the "coalition partner" the United Kingdom? As the sun was setting on the British Empire, Winston Churchill realised that the only way Britain was going to matter in the new world was by closely latching on to the US. That is why Churchill cajoled and begged President Franklin Roosevelt to join World War II to save British butts. Churchill went to Tehran and Yalta meetings of the Allies as the third wheel, to give the appearance of power, where the two men representing the real superpowers, Roosevelt and Stalin, ignored him. Nevertheless, Churchill famously advised the British, "Never go against the wishes of the United States!" Every British government since then, be it Tory or Labour, and every Prime Minister in office has heeded Churchill's advice. That is why what the British so grandiloquently call "special

relationship," with the US, appears to the rest of the world as "master-servant relationship." Why couldn't Tony Blair keep his promise to the world not to go to war against Iraq without a second UN resolution? Because that would have violated Churchill's decree not to go against the wishes of the United States!

Of course, imperial Britain had a knack for creating mischief all over the world. It left the Kashmir problem unresolved, thus making sure India and Pakistan remained enemies forever. Through the Balfour Declaration in 1917 it promised the Jews a homeland in Palestine over the objection of the Palestinians, abruptly ended its mandate in Palestine triggering the creation of the state of Israel and the unending suffering of the Palestinians. It forced three disparate provinces of the Ottoman Empire (Kurdish Sunni north, Sunni Arab middle and Shia south), into a nation and named it Iraq. It gave most of the coastline to tiny Kuwait, making Iraq almost landlocked. And now, after destroying the credibility of world institutions such as the UN through its unauthorised offensive against Iraq, it has undertaken a propaganda offensive! It appears that the British government machinery really believes that the rest of the world is so dumb that repeated recirculation of failed lies about why Iraq was invaded would make believers out of the skeptical world! One may or may not agree with the French and German positions on the war against Iraq, but they have at least shown far more backbone than the British!

What is the inside story here in America? Last week the writer was fortunate enough to be in the company of a very well known Pulitzer Prize-winning American journalist (whose name I shall withhold) for three hours. I shall paraphrase as faithfully as I can some of the comments he made. Here goes: America is being ruled

LETTER FROM AMERICA

America has lost the support of many of its long time allies, including neighbours Canada and Mexico, by circumventing the UN. Even now, the Bushies are unwilling to admit any mistake, and remain opposed to bringing in the UN, except in a subservient role. America's lying, cheating and cabal have been transparent to the rest of the world. In short, for America's future, the war against Iraq has been a humongous mistake.

by a coterie of about nine men who could be best described as neoconservatives (read "Jewish" or Likudniks). The neocons include President Bush, Vice President Dick Cheney, Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz, Richard Perle (Chair, Defence Policy Board), Douglas Feith (Under Secretary of Defence), John Bolton (Under Secretary of State), David Wurmser (special assistant to the Under Secretary of State for Arms Control), and Elliott Abrams of the National Security Council. Most of the above neocons are Jewish, with passionate attachment to Israel. "The Weekly Standard," "Commentary," "The New Republic," "National Review," and "The Wall Street Journal," are their publications. Their omniscient journalists are omnipresent all television news and commentary channels espousing the virtues of Israel and decrying the vices of Arabs, Muslims and "militant Islam."

The journalist said that the Americans, including award-winning journalists like him are worried about America's future, but are afraid to demand honesty from their leaders. He believes that President Bush and Attorney General Ashcroft are showing scant respect for the laws and traditions of this country and are beginning to indulge in the untruth. Although the President did not present any shred of evidence about the Iraqi complicity in international terrorism, Americans were told that Iraq was an IMMEDIATE threat to

America. Thus far the contention of the skeptics that sanctioned Iraq was a toothless tiger has been proven right. No scud missiles had been fired at Israel and no "weapons of mass destruction" have been found. Was the President a victim of bad information? No, according to the investigative reporter. American intelligence knew that by 1995 all weapons of mass destruction were destroyed in Iraq. American Special forces, Delta Force and Grey Wolves, who scoured Iraq before the formal war, also found nothing! Furthermore, worldwide, terrorism decreased last year. So why was "not smart but cunning" Bush, overstating the danger? Because,

Bush is taking full advantage of 9/11 tragedy to remake the world in the image of "neocons.". Why the lies? Leo Strauss, a conservative Professor at Chicago, now deceased, had taught his protégés like Paul Wolfowitz the concept of "the noble lie." Apparently, "Wolfie" has successfully passed it on to "Bushie!"

Terrorism is nothing new in the west. Spain, France and Britain have lived with terrorism for sixty years. Bush took full advantage of the terrorism of 9/11 to push forward the doctrine of preemption abroad, and curtailment of civil liberties at home. Saddam was no international terrorist. He oppressed only his own people. So

did Stalin and Mao, and so does North Korea and Cuba. Yet America was and is perfectly happy with containment in those cases. Traditionally, American laws applied to anyone living within its shores. Attorney General John Ashcroft is violating the rights of non-citizens, and even the citizens of the Islamic faith. Zacarius Moussoui, the so-called 20th hijacker who was arrested before 9/11, has been in isolation for two years, and is being denied plea-bargaining because Ashcroft wants the death penalty for him. The prisoners at Guantanamo are being treated as animals, with no rights, according to the journalist.

The Democrats and the Press are cowed. But someday the embedded journalists covering the Iraq war will tell their story. In the first days of war, a few Iraqis hoisting the white flags engaged the American troops in combat. From the second day, no Iraqis could surrender to the troops, who shot on sight. There has been tremendous killing of the civilians, 20,000 to 30,000 dead, according to the journalist. In Basra, British soldiers opened fire on fleeing civilians. Confronted by an embedded journalist, a soldier replied matter-of-factly: "All Iraqis are cancer, I am chemotherapy!"

Why didn't Saddam tell the world, "Look guys, I don't have any weapons of mass destruction; come, see for yourselves?" According to the journalist, westerners tend to mirror image their non-western adversaries. They expect nonwesterners to behave exactly the way a westerner would. What Saddam was told by sycophants surrounding him, whether his



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Suicide attacks

Stepping back from solution of problems?

SIDDIGUR RAHMAN

ON 23 March 2003, Moscow conducted a "constitutional referendum" in Chechnya for a new charter, which directly asserts that the republic is part of the Russian Federation and hands over power to a (pro-Moscow) Chechen Administration. It was, however, the verdict of 96 per cent Chechens that gave birth of an illusion of optimism that the country would slowly move towards stability and peace. But the suicide attack carried on by some Chechen rebels at Cossack village of Znamenskoye in northern Chechnya on 12 May and another attack on 14 May during a religious festival in the village of Iliskhan-Yurt in eastern Chechnya killing at least 75 innocent people and injuring more than 300, has replaced that optimism by frustration and uncertainty.

The attacks have been condemned by peace-loving people all over the world. The leadership of the Council of Europe -- PACE chairman Peter Schieder and secretary-general Walter Schwimmer -- condemned the terrorist act against an administrative building in Znamenskoye, saying "The civilized world can feel nothing but contempt for those who use indiscriminate violence against innocents in order to achieve their political

objectives. The people of Chechnya have known nothing but war and destruction for years, today they need and want nothing but peace and hope for a better, more stable future".

In his reaction on the suicide attacks in Chechnya and Saudi Arabia, the UN Secretary General Kofi Annan condemned these saying that the attacks were "against all decent tenets of religion, against human rights, indeed against humanity". Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia has termed the attack in Riyadh as "heinous act", while the Arab States condemned it as "criminal acts", "contradictory to Islam" and "having negative impact on peace and stability." It is notable that the suicide attack in northern Chechnya had happened a day before a similar attack in Saudi capital Riyadh on 13 May, which killed at least 29 persons including 7 Americans. The 14 May suicide attack in eastern Chechnya was followed by a series of suicide bomb attacks in the Moroccan city of Casablanca in the late night of 16 May killing at least 41 and injuring 100. Morocco's Interior Minister Mostafa Sahel said on 17 May, "These attacks bear the hallmarks of international terrorism...The terrorists' goal was to disrupt democratic process and political pluralism." The Russian Foreign Ministry said that the Morocco blasts were the work of an international network that was likely

behind recent suicide bombings in Saudi Arabia and Chechnya. Pope condemned it as "blind violence that hits the innocents."

The tenacity of suicide attacks has risen sharply during the recent years. In last two years the world has seen the horrifying crush of the World Trade Center, the devastating attack in Bali of Indonesia, the bomb blast in a Kenyan Hotel, sporadic incidents in the Philippines and frequent suicide attempts in Palestine, Kashmir and Chechnya. Though the root causes behind such violence in most of the cases are absolutely political, people related to this violence have chosen the bloody way, a wrong alternative, for settling the problems.

Chechnya is a tiny (15,800 square kilometers) autonomous republic situated on the southern border of the Russian Federation having only one million indigenous people of the north Caucasian mountains having been ruled by Russia since last 200 years as usually without any special significance to the rest of the world. But suddenly Chechnya has appeared in the news media and become an attention-grabbing topic for many after declaring its independence by a retired general of the Soviet Army namely Dzukhar Dudayev in 1991, taking the opportunity of political crisis in the then Soviet Union.

During 1991-1994 and 1997-

1999 Chechnya fought two wars with Russian troops and conducted several suicide attacks including seizure of Moscow theater in October 2002, where some 700 general people were attending a performance. Suicide attack was carried out in December 2002 on the Headquarters of Chechnya's government at Grozny which killed 83 people. Bomb attacks in shopping arcade at Moscow in August 1999, blowing out an apartment building in September of the same year and attacking on Vologodonsk in Dagestan killed hundreds of civilians -- with which there happened to be evidential linkages with the Chechen rebels.

By birth Chechens belong to the Muslim community which helped them to draw the sympathy of the Muslim extremists like Saudi dissident Osama bin Laden and Jordanian citizen Khattab. Russia has been accusing that the Islamic mercenaries coming mostly from Arab states are adding fuel to the flame of terrorism. During the "Operation Enduring Freedom" many Chechens fought alongside the Taliban against the Northern Alliance. The US State Department has officially added three Chechen groups to its list of organizations that pose a "significant risk" of committing acts of terrorism, and imposed strict financial restraints on members of the groups and those who may support them. Along with the

United States the Russian President Vladimir Putin declared that al-Qaeda members were responsible for the recent suicide attacks in Saudi Arabia and Chechnya.

History says that without political initiatives based on discussions, dialogues and negotiations permanent peaceful solution is unachievable in the present world. Many countries have admitted this reality. The Tamils in Sri Lanka have given up arms after the fruitless fighting for two decades against the government and are trying to solve the problem through political dialogue. Same thing happened in Bangladesh. The Jana Sanghati Samity of the Chittagang Hill Tracts apparently ended bloodshed by signing a treaty on 2 December 1997. The United Nations and many other countries of the world including the Arab states and Turkey are advising Kurds not to be disintegrated from Iraq. Recently India and Pakistan have realised that dialogue is the effective weapon to settle the Kashmir problem and accepted finally the political dialogue. Killings and counter killings proved worthless to establish peace in Palestine. The Chechen fighters should realise this harsh reality and show honour to majority of Chechens who voted for "constitutional referendum".

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