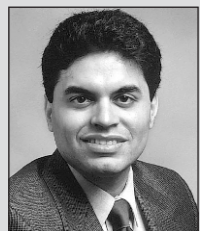


# Bush's really good idea

The US president finds it easy to embrace democracy, but not the various means to make it happen



**FAREED ZAKARIA**  
writes from America

SOMETIMES I think that President Bush's critics need to put up a sign somewhere in their rooms that reads: "Some things are true even if George W. Bush believes them." A visceral dislike for the president is boxing many otherwise sensible people into a corner because they cannot bring themselves to agree with anything he says. How else to explain the churlish reaction among so many Democrats, Europeans and intellectuals to the president's speech on democracy in the Middle East last week? Whatever the problems -- and I'll get to them -- as a speech it stands as one of the most intelligent and eloquent statements by a president in recent memory. (Don't take my word for it: read it at [www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/11/20031106-2.html](http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/11/20031106-2.html).) If it marks a real shift in strategy, it will go down in history as Bush's most important speech.

The president expanded on an analysis that he and national security adviser Condoleezza Rice have been veering toward for several months. He argued that a deficit of freedom and openness were at the heart of the Middle East's dysfunctions, that neither Islam nor Arab culture made liberty and democracy impossible there, and that American foreign policy had for too long supported a corrupt status quo that has been bad for the Arabs and bad for the West. "Sixty years of Western nations' excusing and accommodating the lack of freedom in the Middle East did nothing to make us safe," he noted.

To change policy and achieve his lofty ambitions, President Bush announced a "forward strategy for freedom" that must be adopted for decades to come. Here is the hole in the doughnut. The "forward strategy" is never fleshed out, not even in a few lines, has no substantive elements to it and no programs associated with it.

If it marks a real shift in strategy, it will go down in history as Bush's most important speech. The president expanded on an analysis that he and national security adviser Condoleezza Rice have been veering toward for several months. He argued that a deficit of freedom and openness were at the heart of the Middle East's dysfunctions, that neither Islam nor Arab culture made liberty and democracy impossible there, and that American foreign policy had for too long supported a corrupt status quo that has been bad for the Arabs and bad for the West.

In fact it is mentioned only at the tail end of the speech. What explains this strange mismatch between a powerful statement of goals and virtual silence about the means?

I think that the president -- and many of his advisers -- find it easy to embrace democracy but not the means to get there. Actually, they like one method. Let's call it the "silver bullet" theory of democratization. It

means that every country is ready for democracy. It's just evil tyrants who stand in its way. Kill the tyrant, hold elections and the people will embrace democracy and live happily ever after. This theory is particularly seductive to neo-conservatives because it means that the one government agency they love -- the military -- is the principal force for democratization around the world.

The second theory of democratization could be called the "long, hard slog" (thanks, Mr. Rumsfeld). It holds that genuine democracy requires the building of strong political institutions, a market economy and a civil society. In order to promote democracy, in this vision, you need economic reform, trade, exchange programs, legal and educational advances, and hundreds of such small-bore efforts. The agencies crucial to this process are the State Department, the U.S. Agency for International Development, even, God forbid, the European Union and the United Nations. After all, the EU provides almost twice as much foreign aid as the United States. And it is the United Nations that produces the much-heralded Arab Development Reports, which President Bush quoted in his speech.

The president must see that the first strategy has reached its limits. They have used military force in Afghanistan and Iraq, and while it has rid those countries of evil dictatorships, it

has not brought them democracy. That goal remains fully dependent on the second strategy. And beyond Iraq and Afghanistan, unless Washington is going to invade all the countries of the Middle East, democracy will come only through a process of reform and modernization. But the administration cannot bring itself to fully support this softer strategy of democratization or call for more of it. (Real men don't do foreign aid.) American efforts to promote democracy, for example,

take up about 6 percent of our aid budget, just over \$700 million. Why not double this?

For many of the administration's ideologists, the long, hard slog toward liberal democracy is boring and unsexy. It means constant engagement, aid, multilateral efforts and a world not of black and white but of grays. Jordan's Abdullah is a monarch, but he is a genuine liberalizer; his opponents in Parliament are elected but reactionaries. In the only illogical

part of his speech, Bush dismissed the idea that countries could be unready for democracy, and then devoted paragraphs to explaining why democracy would take time to flourish in the Middle East.

The neoconservative writer Robert Kagan recently declared, "We do not really know how to build a liberal society. ... But we do know a free and fair election when we see one." This is both defeatist and wrong. In fact, we know what makes a liberal society -- independent courts and political institutions, markets, a free press, a middle class -- but building it takes time and effort. If you cannot embrace that process, then you are not really embracing democracy.

Fared Zakaria is the editor of Newsweek International (c) 2003, Newsweek, Inc. All rights reserved. Reprinted by permission.



# Ending gender discrimination is the key

DR. BADIUL ALAM MAJUMDAR

IT is now well known that the incidence of cardiovascular disease and diabetes is highest among South Asians. Research studies show that in the United Kingdom women and men from the South Asian community have a 50% higher risk of dying from heart disease compared to the white European population. According to the available statistics, in 1996 the average number of patients with heart ailments in India was 7.1 per thousand relative to 6.4 for the world. For the developed countries, the comparable number was 6.9 per thousand, despite the fact that cardiovascular diseases are widely viewed to be diseases of affluence. Similarly, the risk of having diabetes is 3 to 4 times higher among the people of South Asia relative to the west.

Many experts attribute the high rates of cardiovascular disease and diabetes among South Asians to bad genes genes with features that make people susceptible to such chronic ailments. A situation of inescapable fate or the act of God! Lifestyle is also considered to have important influences on the risk.

However, recent scientific evidence gives a different explanation, which is quite startling and even frightening for South Asians. Scientists are now saying that the future health of the child is shaped largely in the womb and the birth weight is a reliable predictor of future well-being of a person. The process by which conditions in the womb shape the future health is called "fetal programming."

The idea of fetal programming is quite sensational in that it creates connections between the health of the mother and the future health of the child. If the pregnant mother suffers from undernourishment, the fetus in her womb will suffer from malnutrition and will be born as a child with low birth weight. According to scientists, birth weight is a marker for a

If deprivation and discrimination against women are ended, the fetus in their womb would be normal and healthy, and they would not give birth to children with low birth weight -- averting its dangerous short and long-term consequences. Thus, if we are to move forward as a nation, the elimination of malnutrition and other forms of deprivation of women must be the highest and most urgent priority of our policymakers.



complex set of factors that influence both growth in the womb and susceptibility to diseases in later life. For example, an undersized liver, associated with low birth weight, is less effective in regulating cholesterol levels in adulthood. Studying 13,249 men born in Hertfordshire and Sheffield in the United Kingdom, Dr. David Barker of the University of Southampton found that a man who weighed less than 2.5 kilograms at birth has a 50% greater chance of dying of heart disease than a man with

a higher birth weight, even accounting for socioeconomic differences and other risk factors. This relationship is subsumed as the "Barker hypothesis" in the scientific literature. Professors Siddiq Osmani and Amartya Sen, in a recent article published in *Economics and Human Biology* (2003), provided detailed evidence and explanations of this sensational connection.

The conventional view is that children born with low birth weight face higher risks after birth because their immune system does not fully

develop because of malnutrition. As a result, they can die of most ordinary diseases.

In Bangladesh, nearly 50% of our children are born with low birth weight, which is among the highest in the world. Over 90% of our children suffer from malnutrition one way or the other. Consequently, nearly 250,000 children die unnecessarily every year. Their deaths are apparently from diarrhea, pneumonia or similar ailments which are not considered to be killer diseases but the real

causes are malnutrition and an underdeveloped immune system.

It is well known that the physical and mental capacity of malnourished children does not develop fully. They sometimes become physically weak and mentally handicapped, and are often a burden for society. According to available statistics, Bangladesh is the only country in the world where the average height of 12 year olds declined 7% during 1937-82. An estimate by UNICEF in 1998 put the potential loss from the foregone productivity of the nation at \$2300 crore for the next ten years, if the problem of malnutrition remained unmitigated.

Widespread malnutrition has other serious consequences in countries like ours where women face frequent and systematic discrimination. Both girls and boys are born with low birth weight and malnutrition, and their numbers are almost equal. However, discrimination against girls starts right after birth. Girls get relatively less food from early childhood, and adolescent girls often get confined within four walls and are frequently deprived of education and health care. Many village girls get married at puberty and quickly get pregnant. These mothers, who are undernourished themselves, invariably give birth to children with low birth weight, creating a vicious circle of malnutrition.

Untimely and unnecessary death and low productivity from malnutrition are daunting problems for Bangladesh. However, the idea of fetal programming adds a dangerous dimension to it by showing that the children who survive childhood malnutrition become susceptible to heart disease and diabetes in later life. Evidence further shows that breast cancer also has its origin in the womb. These consequences of maternal undernourishment and low birth weight create a double jeopardy for a country like Bangladesh. Because of

# EU getting ready to boost its global role

Another cold war phase in the making?

Another 'political storm' seems to be gathering which might cause extensive damage to EU-US relations. Several EU countries, including France and Germany, had decided recently to establish a separate multinational forces headquarters not later than 2004 for European operations where NATO is not involved... America, perhaps as a counter-measure, had announced the formation of NATO's Quick Strike Force (QSF) where eastern European countries are being invited to join.

AM M SHAHABUDDIN

THE European Union (EU) is now emerging as a powerful bloc, representing a newly revitalised united Europe, to face the world's only superpower, America, both economically and politically. In a draft joint statement, at the end of their recent Rome meeting, the European leaders had launched EU's unprecedented draft constitution with a view to boosting "its role on the world stage." The EU is expected to add more 'muscles' in its new 'body-politic' with the most ambitious programme of expanding EU's present membership of 15 to 25 next year with the admission of ten new members, eight of which will be from the former Soviet-dominated East European countries. This new addition is expected to add "weight and authority to Europe's role in the world."

The current Italian EU presidency wants to complete the negotiations at the current two-month inter-governmental conference (IGC) ending in December to pave the way for the new treaty to be signed by the member states before the next EU Parliament elections scheduled for June next year (2004).

Hence all eyes are now set on the outcome of the on-going two-month IGC meetings which will be responsible to give the draft constitution a final shape to be accepted by all member states. That is why the French President Jacques Chirac had cautioned his fellow EU leaders not to open a 'Pandora's Box' by seeking substantial changes to the draft constitution, that may ultimately lead to the failure of the IGC meetings. Thus the EU now stands at the crossroads to achieve its dream of playing a global role to face its powerful rival, America.

## EU's new reform measures

Let us now recapitulate some of the important reform measures adopted at the EU meeting held in Goepte recently. First, a historic blue-print constitution has been prepared by the EU leaders, which is now being mooted at the IGC meetings for approval at its next meeting scheduled for December in Rome. The draft constitution was presented to the Rome meeting of the EU in October by no less a personality than the former French President, Giscard D'Estaing, who claimed to have finalised the draft after 16 months of debating on it by a 105-member convention held in Brussels. The main features of the draft EU constitution are: (a) a long-term president of the EU, instead of its current six-month rotating system; (b) A new full-fledged foreign minister; and (c) Reduction in the right of veto. Giscard D'Estaing believes that the draft, when adopted, would serve the 46-year old EU for next five decades. When the new constitution comes into force, the EU is expected to become more stronger than what it is today. In short, in loose terms, the EU will be more known as a 'United States of Europe' (USE), as a global power.

Besides political issues, it will be the economics and trade that would become poignant is streamlining EU-US relations. The recent so-called 'banana-war' between America and

EU is a case in point. The EU decision to buy banana from the Caribbeans instead of its traditional supplier America raised a great furore from Washington which, as a punishment, raised unilaterally its tariff wall to 100 p.c. on goods imported from EU. When the matter was referred to WTO by EU, the world trade body came down on America with heavy hands asking it to pay compensation to the EU for the loss sustained by the latter because of high tariffs. America has now announced to settle the issue.

## New common farm policy

Another land-mark event that took place at a recent meeting of EU agriculture ministers in Luxembourg will cast far-reaching impact on the shape of US-EU relations. The EU farm ministers struck a historic agreement to reform the EU's much-disputed Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) that would strengthen EU's hand in world trade talks at WTO vis-à-vis America. It has already been hinted by the Greek agriculture minister, after the meeting, that the new farm agreement would serve as a boon to farmers at home and abroad and will also strengthen EU's hand at the WTO talks on international trade reforms. The new step would certainly raise many eye-brows across the Atlantic.

The European farm commissioner, Frenz Fischler, had already pointed the "finger squarely" at Washington to follow EU's lead and slash farm-aid. The commissioner, rather sarcastically and in an oblique reference to US practice of throwing 'advice' often on the EU, said: "There are a lot of schoolmasters telling us in the last few months that we have to do some home-work. Now it is upto others to do their homework." The EU commissioner also directly criticised "America friends" and alleged that America had "resurrected a lot of trade-distorting policies of the past and actually increased agricultural support enormously."

In view of such open lashes, and that also with a tinge of sarcasm, America must be pulling up its socks for a trial of strength at the future WTO trade talks.

## Highest US farm subsidies

Although US often cries wolf accusing other countries of "unfairly" blocking its farm exports, it is the US government that is known to be the provider of highest subsidies to its farmers in order to boost huge exports abroad, particularly in developing countries. Here is one example to prove the point. America, which is a major cotton producer and exporter, granted last year (2002) to its cotton farmers some 3.9 billion US dollars as subsidies which is said to be three times of the total amount of the annual US economic aid to all the African countries!

## What's being cooked in backyards?

The vicious circle of hide-and-seek between Europe and America in outwitting each other in political and economic fields has been at work for about five decades or so. America once enjoyed monopoly on the post-war West European countries which were re-built by America through Marshal Aid, later putting its huge army in different parts through

newly-formed NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organisation) under US leadership. The grateful European countries showed their unstinted support to NATO, and as a matter of fact, to America, for helping the economically-shattered West European nations to stand on their own again. But every beginning has its end, however cruel a joke it may be to all concerned. So it happened with America when things started changing for the better. This ultimately led to the emergence of a new politico-economic scenario which led to the creation of a new Europe, which now perhaps proves to be a Frankenstein's ghost for America. The appearance of Europe's common currency, 'euro', has already assumed a role of a rival to the mighty US dollar.

So what started with the creation of the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1957, following a meeting of leading West European countries, was the first step towards the establishment of the EU. And this followed the formation of NATO by America in 1949 to serve as a bulwark against the expansion of the Soviet regime towards the west. But a new picture, may be considered as hostile by some, is now emerging, following the collapse of the Soviet Union.

## Another political storm?

Another 'political storm' seems to be gathering which might cause extensive damage to EU-US relations. Several EU countries, including France and Germany, had decided recently to establish a separate multinational forces headquarters not later than 2004 for European operations where NATO is not involved, side by side with the development of European Rapid Reaction Force (RRF) open to all European countries. And, surprisingly, Britain, a leading member of EU, was not invited to this meeting, perhaps considering its too close proximity with America. This new move on the part of some EU countries, particularly keeping Britain outside, had evoked angry reaction in Washington and London, which had warned against any "duplication" of NATO. It is to be seen how EU reacts to this Anglo-US warning.

Another subtle game is also going on. While EU is busy in wooing the eastern European countries for admission to EU, America, perhaps as a counter-measure, had announced the formation of NATO's Quick Strike Force (QSF) where eastern European countries are being invited to join.

Many consider this new development is bound to create new cracks in the EU-US relations, despite the recent compromise on Iraq issue in the Security Council. It is really difficult to predict where this game of outwitting each other will end up. The new scenario, looming large on the horizon is ominous. Now the question is: will it ultimately lead to the creation of another volatile situation for a new phase of another, or rather, second 'cold war' period between the two blocs, one led by new Europe and another by the seasoned world power, America? Only time will show what is lotted for the peace-loving peoples of the world.

AMM Shahabuddin is a retired UN official.

widespread poverty, a large segment of the people are already struggling to make ends meet, and the additional health care costs associated with chronic diseases, such as heart disease and diabetes, are beyond their means. This creates the specter of bankrupting the entire nation.

It should be noted that the risk from fetal programming is relatively higher for the well-to-do in our society. Many of our today's rich had humble beginnings. A large number of them were born with low birth weight. With affluence, their food habits and way of living have dramatically changed. Many of them also have a sedentary life style and are unwilling to do physical exercise. Such habits greatly increase the risk of being afflicted with cardiovascular disease and diabetes.

What follows from the above is that the best protection against the serious consequences of malnutrition and low birth weight is gender equality. If deprivation and discrimi-

nation against women are ended, the fetus in their womb would be normal and healthy, and they would not give birth to children with low birth weight -- averting its dangerous short and long-term consequences. Thus, if we are to move forward as a nation, the elimination of malnutrition and other forms of deprivation of women must be the highest and most urgent priority of our policymakers. Such elimination should obviously start early. "National Girl Child Day" is celebrated every year on September 30<sup>th</sup> to create mass awareness on the need for giving priority to, and investing in, girls.

The urgency of eliminating discrimination against women in general, and girl children in particular, arises from the fact that getting the benefits of such elimination generally takes two generations. If proper care and attention are given to the girl child that is born underweight today, then she will be able to greatly, although

not fully, overcome the risks associated with low birth weight. The child that she will give birth to in adult life would likely be relatively normal and healthy. If the girl child born from such a mother is properly taken care of, she will be able to give birth to a fully normal offspring. Thus, the future health of a grown up depends greatly on the health of her maternal grandmother and the health of the fetus of her/his mother in the grandmother's womb. Because of such long delays in receiving benefits, we must take urgent initiatives, with no delays, to remove gender inequality. Otherwise the goal of creating a hunger-free, self-reliant Bangladesh will continue to elude us.

Dr. Badiul Alam Majumdar is Country Director, The Hunger Project-Bangladesh.