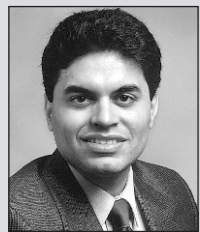


# The Democrats' own quagmire



**FAREED ZAKARIA**  
writes from Washington

**T**HE effort by his Democratic rivals to portray Howard Dean as the reincarnation of George McGovern will not work. Dean is not a peacenik. If you read his foreign-policy speech given in Los Angeles on Dec. 15 -- the one being roundly criticized -- you will be struck by how centrist and sensible it is. In it, Dean is tough on terrorism and proposes several intelligent policies, such as a vastly bigger effort to deal with "loose nukes" in the former Soviet Union and beyond. He outlines a vigorous, internationalist foreign policy that is not much different from that of the other Democratic candidates. And yet his position on the Iraq War will plague him, politically and intellectually.

Being against the Iraq War doesn't make you a pacifist. During Vietnam, opposition to the war signaled a broader opposition to American involvement in the world. Many of those against that war were against all wars. In the case of Iraq, while pacifists demonstrated in the streets, the mainstream opposition had a disagreement on strategy. Iraq, they argued, was a distraction from the war on terror; in fact it hurt the main struggle. I disagree -- for one example, look at the effect of the Iraq War on Libya's decision to disarm -- but it's a plausible thesis and not one indicating isolationism.

The broader problem, however, is that the Iraq War has happened. Arguing against it now is refighting history rather than presenting a vision for the future. More important, today the reconstruction of Iraq is at the centre of American foreign policy. In dollars, public attention and potential consequences, it is the largest single project that the United States has undertaken in a generation. President George W. Bush has placed it at the heart of his world view, making an eloquent case that helping to turn Iraq into

a stable, modern and democratic state will send a signal across the Middle East, encourage economic and political reform and stem the forces that fuel terrorism. The Democrats have to decide where they stand on this basic, big issue.

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**Dean says he thought the war was a terrible blunder -- a "catastrophic mistake," said Al Gore when endorsing him -- but now that we're there, we should stay and see it through. This makes no sense. If the war was a blunder -- draining resources and distracting Washington -- the smartest thing to do is get out fast.**

that we're there, we should stay and see it through. This makes no sense. If the war was a blunder -- draining resources and distracting Washington -- the smartest thing to do is get out fast. Dean has argued that America must stay in Iraq because it cannot allow the country to become a base for al-Qaeda. But that outcome could easily be avoided by our pulling out and turning the place over to a general or Shiite leader who will also have no interest in having his country become an al-Qaeda base. Why bother helping in a massive transformation of politics, eco-

nomics and society in Iraq? In a sense, the most consistent Democrat in the race is not Dean, but Congressman Dennis Kucinich, who says the war was a mistake, so let's leave now.

Some Democrats, like Hillary Clinton and Joseph Lieberman, have criticized the administration for having a worthy goal but doing a good thing badly. And there's much to criticize. The

reconstruction has been botched from the start, with too few troops, weak leadership (remember Jay Garner?), self-defeating arrogance and now (at least the appearance of) a cut-and-run transfer of power. It has produced problems that were predictable -- indeed were predicted. But to make this critique effectively, the Democrats have to buy into the basic goal of Iraq policy. If Howard Dean has his way, the party of Woodrow Wilson will be decidedly uninterested in the most Wilsonian project in recent history.

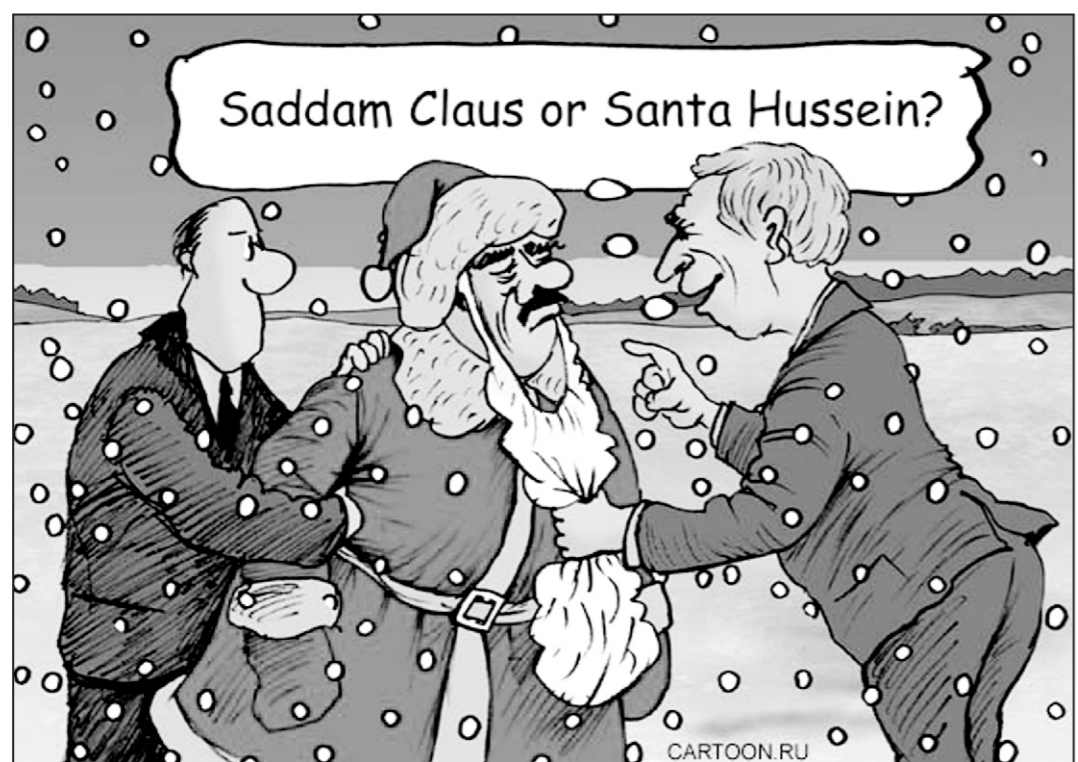
As a political strategy, the

antiwar position is based on a bet that in six months Iraq will be at least as unstable and unsettled as it is now, and probably spiraling downward. If that is the case, the argument goes, President Bush's approval rating will keep dropping.

Perhaps. But if the situation in Iraq is scary, if instability is spreading across the country, America will be more fully and deeply engaged in a war with some very nasty enemies. In such a situation, will the average American -- in, say, Pennsylvania or Michigan states Democrats must win -- look to Howard Dean to get them through the dangerous times, or to Bush, Cheney, Rumsfeld and Powell?

There is, of course, the possibility that things in Iraq will not look so bad six months from now. It's possible that the American armed forces will get better at handling the insurgency, that the rare spectacle of Middle Eastern caucuses and elections will be underway, that Iraqis will be having a spirited debate about what an Islamic democracy means and that Iraq will be seeing the stirring of genuine free-market activity. And what will be the Democratic Party's response to this reality? Will it still be explaining that the war was a "catastrophic mistake?"

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# Gaddafi's gambit

## The dawn of overdue prudence

ESAM SOHAIL writes from Kansas, USA

**O**NE does not have to like Libyan leader Colonel Muammar Gaddafi to give credit where credit is due. His recent and somewhat surprising decision to unconditionally dismantle his weapons of mass destruction (WMD) is welcome news for the region and the world. Equally importantly, it is another piece of glad tidings for the people of Libya and foreign expatriates there both of whom have suffered immensely in the last twenty plus years largely due to the imprudence of the Tripoli leadership.

When Gaddafi came to power in a 1969 coup, he was considered a smart, young, idealistic officer who promised to bring his backward desert country into the twentieth century. The first few years of his revolution saw credible progress with regular parliamentary elections, sharp rise in per capita income and purchasing power, and a growing social security infrastructure staffed largely by expatriate health and educational professionals. Paid for by Libyan petroleum, one of the cleanest in the world, Libyan prosperity was evident in the humble streets clogged by expensive French cars, department stores bulging with consumer goods, and in the millions remitted by Arab and South Asian expatriate workers. Libyans vacationed in Italy, went to shop for furniture in Germany, and studied in the United States. Then things suddenly began to change around the tenth anniversary of Gaddafi's revolution as the Colonel decided on being a global player. He ended up more of a pariah than a player.

By the mid-eighties, Gaddafi had fought losing border wars with Egypt and Chad and been bombed by NATO for providing training camps to all kinds of terrorist groups and fringe elements (including the famous Farooq-Rashid duo of the August 15 tragedy). His agents had murdered a British policewoman in London, blown a couple of airliners in Europe, and kidnapped his own outspoken foreign minister Dr. Masnour Khikha from Cairo. Libyan mercenaries were caught fighting in civil wars in all corners of Africa. Never mind the Americans and Europeans, most Arabs and Africans had enough of Libyan adventurism, to the point that the late Anwar Sadat publicly called Gaddafi *al wald majnoon* (the mad boy). At an African summit, Sudan's Islam first President Jafar Nimeri further underscored Sadat's point. The idiosyncrasies of their ruler were costing ordinary Libyans, an easy-

**Whether Gaddafi's recent efforts to reach out to the world will help him personally or not is irrelevant in terms of the big picture. What is important is that these initiatives are showing encouraging results in the lives of the five million ordinary Libyans. There is reason to be hopeful that Libya's oil wealth, until recently either sequestered or squandered on dubious extraneous causes, will again be available for building a better life for the average Libyan family.**



Muammar Gaddafi

going, affable bunch, dearly.

Prohibited by Gaddafi's detractors from travelling to most of their vacation spots anymore, Libyans found little comfort at home where Gaddafi's frequently changing 'Arab socialism' had destroyed the mercantile class, ruined the very limited arable land, and left his people to shop at empty state-run superstores. Where once stores could not get rid of the latest Japanese electronics and fancy European toys, now there was rationing of essentials like butter and rice. Having spent most of his treasury in bankrolling the IRA and intra-African civil wars, Gaddafi countered the seething economic discontent by resorting to increasingly absolutist rule that brooked no opposition and was particularly ferocious with the minority Berbers and the traditional Sufi zawia lodges. Not even in Arab history has so much promise for so many been bargained away so quickly for so little.

Prudence has the amazing capacity, however, of dawning on

the most unpredictable minds. Since late nineties Muammar Gaddafi has apparently taken a long, hard look at the plight of his people and his own future in a very changed world. Domestically, he has reluctantly allowed the merchants to open back their shops, journalists to modestly criticize the regime, and ordinary citizens to have access to telephones and even the Internet (for most of Gaddafi's rule, private homes could not have telephones). Internationally, Tripoli has managed to have the crippling UN sanctions lifted after handing over terrorists it had been sheltering. Furthermore, Gaddafi has smoothed out his erstwhile rocky relations with his Arab and African brethren by promising not to intervene in their internal affairs.

The results of Gaddafi's belated pragmatism are showing already.

Libya, rich with ancient Roman ruins dotted along its gorgeous coastline, is being promoted as a tourism destination by some European operators while Libyan tourists, students, and athletes are being slowly welcomed back in places like France and Britain. Ordinary Libyans, until recently burdened with plenty of dinars that chased non-existent consumer goods, are able to browse the markets again, albeit in a limited fashion.

The recent accord on the Libyan WMD programme is another wrung in the ladder of Gaddafi's belated efforts to re-join the international community. It is especially a big step towards the possibility of the lifting of American sanctions on Libya, sanctions that have been terrible for the cash-producing Libyan oil sector that long depended on American imports, expertise and technology. Substituting American know-how with second rate Canadian and Russian counterparts did not particularly help the bottomline in Tripoli's National Oil Company.

Whether Gaddafi's recent efforts to reach out to the world will help him personally or not is irrelevant in terms of the big picture. What is important is that these initiatives are showing encouraging results in the lives of the five million ordinary Libyans. There is reason to be hopeful that Libya's oil wealth, until recently either sequestered or squandered on dubious extraneous causes, will again be available for building a better life for the average Libyan family. Young Libyans, with only two domestic universities of questionable quality to choose from, will be able once more to pursue higher education elsewhere. Expatriates of African and Asian countries, including thousands of Bangladeshis, who have built Libya's health, education, and housing network may have a slightly easier time travelling to and remitting from the North African country. In other words, it is possible that should Colonel Gaddafi's present commonsense continue as policy, Libyans and their foreign guest workers will have slightly less inconvenient lives.

That is good news from a country that usually does not generate such in abundance.

# Racism : A necessity in France?

FAZLUL ALAM

**H**IJAB or covering of the head by scarves particularly by young girls in French schools has been a hot issue going on for a long time. Years ago, back in 1989, one head of a state school was sacked because her order to expel two Muslim girls for wearing headscarves was found to be racist. Similar incidents have happened in other European countries though they did not make much headway in the media for mysterious reasons. Germany and Italy, the two EU countries with sizeable Muslim populations from abroad, face the same question.

France decided to resolve the dispute once and for all and earlier this year President Jacques Chirac appointed a 20-member group headed by the national ombudsman. The group's recommendations came out on the second week of December 2003. The main recommendation is that all "conspicuous" signs of religious belief -- specifically Jewish skullcaps, oversized Christian crosses and Islamic headscarves -- be outlawed in state-approved schools. The group upheld a 1989 court ruling that it was not illegal to wear religious symbols in schools but the law forbids "ostentatious" religious signs that "constitute an act of pressure, provocation, proselytism or propaganda". The interpretation of the ruling could vary in respect of the hijab, and though they did not find so earlier, the French authority now supported by the national ombudsman find that the hijab is "provocative". President Chirac has obliged the finding by supporting it.

Is this a racist action? It seems that the law has been interpreted differently so that the ban would not be termed racist. The French authority has carefully termed the action as maintaining a secular society in France is of urgent importance, and the ban on hijab in the state schools is a step towards that. How sincere does this ring to you and me? France

has always been upholding secular values and the present government in true republican spirit supports the same. Why then have the authorities decided to pinpoint hijab as a non-secular issue that like Jewish skull-caps and oversized Christian Cross must be banned? The inclusion of the last two in the list may soothe some weak hearted progressives, but these are just cosmetic additions for they had never been practiced by the school children in France.

How then, we should interpret the action of banning the hijab in the French state schools? How does a hijab or a veil or a long Arab style dress (for men) become provocative? What has

sometimes forming even a nation, living in a specific territory are divided in their social roles and acceptance. In other words, their society is often stratified with status asymmetry rather than equality being the norm. Once the social asymmetry is in action, the whole society becomes segmented into sections and/or groups. The division creates marginalised groups or communities because they hold no power in relation to the dominant groups. They tend to occupy second-rate housing, education and health services. They are economically frustrated for many overbearing reasons.

Such situation prevails in almost all nation states, and more

there are laws against practice of racism in the western European countries; simple social discriminations do not come under the laws of racism. Without going into internationally accepted definition of racism, we can from the viewpoint of common sense see that the French action being directed to a religious group cannot be racist, but overall, since the group affected by the action comprises of a racially distinct group, namely North African and Algerian Muslims, it must be racist. Similar situation prevailed in Britain where action against wearing of turbans by the Sikhs was not considered racist, but they could not ban it because it constituted a cultural factor in

nant French society of European people (irrespective of religious affiliations), they tend to display their identity to each other for support and defend possible racist attacks on them. They did not need such solidarity back home in Algeria. The situation is similar with the Muslims from Turkey in Germany. In Turkey, hijabs etc are banned from seats of learning, but the Turkish Muslim women in Germany wear them as they go out of doors.

On another count, the hijabs and veils bring another funny question. Why do not the men of the North African and Algerian origin in France display some kind of religious identity

We have hardly undertaken a qualitative survey of the situation in all these countries to determine what made them start wearing hijabs and veils after so many years of not wearing them! It may also be that the 11th September incident and earlier perceiving of a war on Islam by the West are also contributing a lot. Men, on the other hand have started to wear Arabic style dresses even in Bangladesh, and they do not necessarily belong to the fundamentalist camps.

The question needs further research not just at the surface, but also at currents and cross currents of politics, economics, faiths, individual choices and sense of rebellion. We do not have the answers as yet, but one thing is certain, the Chirac support of a racist or discriminatory ruling is not so much a social action, but deeply political. We cannot forget the threat from the National Front of Jean-Marie Le Pen who after defeating Jospin was so close to defeating Chirac earlier. If Le Pen came to power, they would have exercised certain extreme right wing measures including harassment of the French Muslims. Banning of the hijabs and veils would not require recommendation of a national committee and involvement of ombudsmen. They would simply organise a riot by tearing the hijabs at the school gates. With the French electorate behind them, such action would not bat many eyelids. President Jacques Chirac knows that, and in order to defeat the possible resurgence of Le Pen, he himself is doing in a civilised manner what Le Pen promises to do by force. The French electorate would now vote for Chirac et al once again as they do not need Le Pen for racist policies. So, racism in France has become a necessity to defeat Le Pen's racist and fascist party. Do you think that is fair?

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the word provocative been taken to mean here? Does it mean that these symbolic dresses provoke racist feelings among the non-Muslims? If that is the case, should we then enact a racist law to defeat racism?

Dressing up in a gown like a judge or an academic is tolerable to me because only persons with appropriate qualifications and authoritative approval can practice that. Like the rituals of *sadhus* and *sannyasis* who dress in peculiar ways usually covered in dust and mud, the whole dressing up business is sometimes very pretentious and funny to me. I cannot help believing that dress is a cultural issue of a group of people developed from a number of factors related mostly to environment and necessities for performing physical tasks. The uniformity of their dress has nothing to do with other cultural issues like religion. This simplistic analysis is not without being problematic. One major problem is that the 'group of people',

so in countries where ethnicity and cultural origins of the people are diverse and out of necessity to preserve the power of the dominant, the already marginalised groups are subjected to unfair and discriminatory treatments.

If such unfair and discriminatory treatments are directed to a group of people because the latter belongs to other race or ethnicity than the dominant group, the treatments may be termed as racist. Such racism may be the outcome of years of subtle propaganda to label certain group of people as inferior, barbarian, uncivilized etc etc. for which unequal treatment to them is 'justified'.

Having said that how do we fit in discriminations by religion or faith of a group of people? Do we call such discriminations racist? Why cannot we leave it to call only discriminatory practice?

The reason for our anxiety to label discriminatory practices against a group as racist is that

that population.

When the people from North Africa and Algeria first started arriving in France as part of drive to fill industrial vacancies in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the Muslim women and girls hardly wore any hijab or veil. Why then, in the new millennium after more than three decades of living in the West, they are now resorting to them? It needs an answer, because the five million Muslims in France can become a force of some kind, as the politicians fear.

Some social researchers in France believe that the answer lies in the social situation of the Muslim populations in France. They are marginalised from the very beginning of their arrival and they are carefully excluded from the mainstream activities. Some whose talents and qualifications have brought them fame and position in the French society shun the people of their home countries as illiterate, backward etc etc. Secondly, being marginalised in a domi-

inant French society of European people (irrespective of religious affiliations), they tend to display their identity to each other for support and defend possible racist attacks on them. They did not need such solidarity back home in Algeria. The situation is similar with the Muslims from Turkey in Germany. In Turkey, hijabs etc are banned from seats of learning, but the Turkish Muslim women in Germany wear them as they go out of doors.

On another count, the hijabs and veils bring another funny question. Why do not the men of the North African and Algerian origin in France display some kind of religious identity

Looking at the other European countries with sizeable Muslim population, as well as at other non-European countries like Bangladesh, we find that wearing a hijab is being considered by many women as their obligation to fulfil the teachings of Koran so that they are assured of a place in heaven.

# Kick the can, please!

ANDREW MORAVCSIK

**E**UROCRATS are pointing fingers at Spain and Poland for sinking the Brussels summit. They might just as well have directed them at Germany. Superficially, the acrimony involved voting rights and whether to stick to the deal reached at Nice three years ago. In fact, the flap was more about money and public opinion.

First the money. The debate over voting rights does not take place in a vacuum. With the extra votes guaranteed by Nice, Spain and Poland could block more EU legislation, then demand greater payments under the EU's structural and regional programs in exchange for lifting their vetoes. Perhaps there is some social justice in this. But Germany, traditionally the "paymaster" of Europe, naturally opposes such shenanigans -- and no longer suffers any Cold War shyness about saying so.

The new voting system would come into being only in 2009, though. So why all the heat now? The answer is public opinion -- and the manipulative myopia it inspires in politicians. European leaders agree on 95 percent of the new constitution; they have bolstered their bargaining clout on the remaining 5 percent by issuing inflammatory and uncompromising public statements. Polish President Aleksander Kwasniewski calls German Chancellor Gerhard Schroder "closed" minded, though he himself is locked in his bargaining position by a 395-14 vote in the Polish Parliament. Germany enlisted France to join in a walkout if Poland and Spain did not back down. With public and parliamentary opinion so aroused, a compromise was impossible.

Commentators and statesmen alike called it a crisis that could split the EU. It won't. Instead, this is a good time for everyone involved to take a deep breath, slow down -- and recall a bit of history. Europe is in difficult straits today precisely because since 1991 it has struck a series of last-minute idealistic deals -- most of them Germany's doing. Here's a short list:

Double Unification. A decade ago Helmut Kohl precipitously pushed two forms of unification -- a single Germany and a single currency, the euro. The two were economically contradictory, and now budgetary rules designed by Germany to constrain profligate Italians (the so-called Stability Pact) are being violated by the country that created them. The

result: Germany now lacks the legitimacy -- and the cash -- to play its traditional leadership role in Europe.

Being Nice at Nice. At 4 a.m. on Dec. 11, 2000, overtired and overtasked national leaders broke days of deadlock when Germany compromised by accepting a skewed voting system for the EU. Jacques Chirac secured for France the same number of votes as Germany, even though the French population is 25 percent smaller; Poland and Spain received nearly the same, though the Polish population is less than half Germany's. Hence the current standoff.

The Constitutional Gamble. The grandly named Convention on the Future of Europe was conceived at the royal palace in Laeken two years ago to "democratize" the EU -- with a nudge from German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer, who hopes to become Europe's first foreign minister. The wager was that by debating a new constitution, public support for the Union would grow. It hasn't. Constant Eurotinkering has made voters cranky and suspicious. For the first time in the Union's half-century history, polls show that fewer than half now view it favorably.

The lesson for Brussels here is clear: Don't rush! Think long term! Remember that early morning deals come back to bite those who make them -- and undermine the European ideal. Remember, too, that Europe's proposed constitution is a conservative document meant to consolidate and modestly extend EU achievement since 1990 -- and fix them for decades in a new Europe of nearly 500 million people.

The "collapse" and "crisis" in Brussels thus has a silver lining. So what if Europe's grandees went home empty-handed? Another early morning compromise in Brussels last week might well have triggered yet another vicious circle of rambunctious referendums, contentious negotiations and deeper public disillusionment. Gisela Stuart, the German-born British M.P. who participated in the EU convention and is somewhat disappointed with the result, sums up the matter succinctly: "It is in our own interest and in the interest of our children to get this right!" A little patience is in order. Europe kicked the can down the road? Good. That's the smart play.

Andrew Moravcsik is a professor of government and director of the European Union Program at Harvard University.

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Fazlul Alam, a researcher, is an information system consultant.