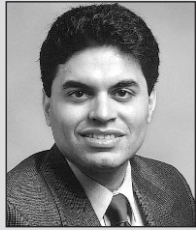


The next step? Think Vietnam

But looking at our circumstances in Iraq should give us some appreciation for the difficulty of his task. With a losing hand and deteriorating conditions on the ground, Kissinger maneuvered to extricate the United States from a situation in which it could not achieve its objectives, while at the same time limiting the damage, shoring up regional allies and maintaining some measure of American credibility. A version of such a strategy is the only one that has any chance of success in Iraq today.



FAREED ZAKARIA
writes from Washington

HERE is much moaning in Washington about the return of the "realists." But what we need is a Kissingerian effort to extricate America.

If you want to understand the futility of America's current situation

in Iraq, last week provided a vivid microcosm. On Thursday, just hours before a series of car bombs killed more than 200 people in the Shia stronghold of Sadr City, Sunni militants attacked the Ministry of Health, which is run by one of Moqtada al-Sadr's followers. Within a couple of hours, American units arrived at the scene and chased off the attackers.

The next day, Sadr's men began reprisals against Sunnis, firing RPGs at several mosques. When U.S. forces tried to stop the carnage and restore order, goons from Sadr's Mahdi Army began firing on American helicopters. In other words, one day the U.S. Army was defending Sadr's militia and, the next day, was attacked by it. We're

in the middle of a civil war and are being shot at by both sides.

There can be no more doubt that Iraq is in a civil war, in which leaders of both its main communities, Sunnis and Shiites, are fomenting violence. The assault on Sadr's Ministry of Health was likely retaliation for a recent mass kidnapping at the Ministry of Education, which still retains some Sunnis. The Ministry of the Interior houses the deadliest killers from the Badr Brigades, the other large Shiite militia. Badr's Bayan Jabr built the death squads when he ran the ministry; he's now Iraq's finance minister, in charge of its resources. This is the Iraqi government we are protecting, funding and attempting to strengthen.

To speak, as the White House deputy press secretary did last week, of "terrorists ... targeting innocents in a brazen effort to topple a democratically elected government" totally misses the reality of Iraq today. Who are the terrorists and who are the innocents?

Among the most pro-American voices to emerge from the new Iraq have been two young Baghdadis, Omar and Mohammed Fadhil, whose three-year-old blog, Iraq the Model, has promoted a relentlessly upbeat and hopeful message. Last week they threw in the towel. "I believe that America would like to see Iraq emerge as a model for the region," Mohammed wrote. "But that cannot be done without having a cooperative Iraqi partner on the ground who shares similar views for Iraq and the Middle East. And that's the point -- that partner does not exist, at least not in the government."

The American army has more than enough troops to confront the Mahdi army. The problem is political, not military. US forces have been repeatedly blocked from

going after Mahdi leaders. This month they were forced by the Iraqi government to abandon raids into Sadr City in search of a kidnapped American soldier. They were not even allowed to stop traffic in the neighborhood. Will more troops change that?

To the contrary, both sides now see American troops as the problem. The Shiite ruling coalition and the Sunni insurgency both believe that if only the United States were to get out of the way, they could defeat their enemies outright. That's why, in the most recent poll of Iraqis, taken in September, 91 percent of Sunnis and 74 percent of Shiites said they wanted American forces to leave within a year.

While these are not conditions that suggest a political deal is likely, there is nothing to be lost in trying. When President Bush meets with Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki in Jordan this week, he should make clear that Iraq's leaders need to come to an agreement that meets both sides' key demands on such issues as autonomy, oil revenues and amnesty. But he needs to deliver an ultimatum: either the



government begins implementing such a deal by January or American troops will begin a drawdown, leaving the core tasks of security to Iraqi forces.

There is much moaning in Washington about the return of the "realists," like James Baker, who are allegedly pushing to surrender America's ideals as the price of bringing stability to the situation in

becoming increasingly similar to the one it faced in Southeast Asia more than 30 years ago. Henry Kissinger's negotiations to end the Vietnam War have been criticized from both the left and right. One side thought he moved too slowly to get us out, the other that he gave up too much.

But looking at our circumstances in Iraq should give us some appreciation for the difficulty of his task. With a losing hand and deteriorating conditions on the ground, Kissinger maneuvered to extricate the United States from a situation in which it could not achieve its objectives, while at the same time limiting the damage, shoring up regional allies and maintaining some measure of American credibility. A version of such a strategy is the only one that has any chance of success in Iraq today.

Fareed Zakaria is Editor of Newsweek International.

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Contributions of home-based workers to GDP

Bangladesh's stride towards economic upliftment, despite all sorts of socio-politico-economic obstacles, is possible only due to the hard-working marginal people of this country. Women, specially, should be given the credit. Although home-based workers contributed about Tk 150 billion to the GDP, their contribution in the national economy is ignored, or not counted. The contribution could be increased if a planned initiative is taken, evaluating their inputs to the national economy.

NAZRUL ISLAM

AMINA Begum (35), a mother of three children, of Sheikh Para village in Bera Upazila of Pabna earns, on an average, Tk 1,200 a month producing embroidered quilt or "nakshi kantha." Her extra earning, along with her rickshawvan-puller husband's income, has brought a sort of economic security in her family. They could send their wards to school, buy their dresses and give them two square meals. Not only that, her husband has opened a monthly Tk 500 deposit scheme for future security of the family. When Amina compares her life style with her neighbours, who did not engage themselves in any income-generating activity, she could understand how happy she is.

Not only Amina, about 100 women of Sheikh Para are engaged in various home-based work, earning a sizeable amount of money and contributing to the family. Rural women are usually involved in home-based work like producing various handicrafts items such as embroidered quilt, wall mat, floor mat, carpet, hand fan, clay jewelry, decoration pieces, bamboo and cane products, sewing, embroidery and tailoring, and also poultry farming and homestead gardening.

The funding and raw materials required for such work are not hard to obtain for a rural woman. Many raw materials are available at a nominal price, or even free of cost, in rural areas. The initial funding required is managed from family members, cooperatives or NGOs having programs to develop home-

based workers and handicrafts producers. Work, on contract or piece-rate basis, is also commissioned by organisations and intermediaries who are in handicrafts marketing and exporting, and in such cases the funding and raw materials are often provided by the commissioning organisations.

Women in this part of the world are traditionally creative and are gifted with artistic skills that they apply in producing handicrafts. The embroidered quilts made by Bangladeshi rural women are appreciated all over the world for their creativity and craftsmanship. These are exported regularly to the developed world.

According to Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics data, there is some 40 million active women labour force in the country. Among them, approxi-

mately 15 million women are engaged in various home-based or household work. A pilot survey by Bangladesh Home Workers Women Association (BHW) in Bera upazila in Pabna shows that a home-based woman worker earns Tk 1,000 a month, on an average. For example, in the month of September, 113 women in Sheikh Para village earned Tk 182,100, in Madhy Karamja village 99 women earned Tk 81,000, while 31 women in Sandel Para earned Tk 69,400.

Although the garment industry is considered to be the largest provider of jobs to unskilled women it provides jobs to only 1.5 million women, and is mainly based in urban areas. The industry would not be able to accommodate millions of unskilled, and mostly illiterate, women residing in rural Bangladesh. Therefore, expansion of home-based work has an immense prospect, through which millions of women could earn their livelihood and improve their socio-economic condition.

By engaging in home-based work the underprivileged women are not only improving their own lives, and that of their families, but are also contributing positively and

effectively to the economy of this country. But unfortunately, the contribution of the home-based workers is not reflected in government statistics. The BBS data shows that the contribution of the industrial sector to GDP in FY 2002-03 was Tk 462.37 billion (constant price of 1995-96). Of the amount, the contribution of large scale industry was Tk 325.58 billion, while small scale industry contributed Tk 136.80 billion. But the contribution of home-based workers was not included here. If the 15 million home-based workers earn, on an average, Tk 1,000 a month then their annual contribution to the GDP would stand at Tk 150 billion.

Women are socially repressed and financially deprived. They are vulnerable to abuse and discrimination from the family, the society and the economic mechanism of the country. At the heart of their problems are two deep-rooted factors: patriarchal attitudes towards women dictate that women should not participate in economic activities and, therefore, there is no need for them to obtain education.

The age-old belief that a woman's place is behind the cur-

tains has been sustained by religious fundamentalism and conservative mindsets. Secondly, because women have largely remained economically unproductive, and also remained mostly illiterate, they are deemed to be weak and inferior, and as a result they become the target of abuse and discrimination. The two factors are correlated, and form a cycle in which the women of our rural society are thrown into from the moment of their birth.

To break out of this cycle, women must take a greater part in economic activities. They should be turned into tools for earning money. To achieve gender equality and earn respect they must obtain education and self-awareness. Only then will the women of our country be empowered. And through this process of self-development they will be able to contribute positively to the economy of the country.

There is hope in our country that micro-credit is a magic pill for eradicating poverty. But, in fact, micro-credit itself can't create any income. The micro-credit financing organisations provide loans without any collateral and yet, at the same

time, they charge very high rate of interest. This becomes a tremendous burden for the poor, and extremely poor, loan recipients. Very often the small loans they obtain in the first place cannot generate further income, as originally intended, through investment in income generating activities like cottage industry. But the pressure of repaying the loan plus interest, usually in weekly installments, subjects them to various forms of torture by the NGO officials.

Quite often, whatever meagre properties the loan defaulters have, like cattle heads, crops or small lands, are forcefully taken away by credit giving NGOs. This compels the poor loan recipients to take further loan from other organisations to pay back the first loan. And doing so, they are plunged into a cycle of debt and poverty. This phenomenon has become widespread in recent times, and it has tarnished whatever benefits the numerous micro-credit programmes had in the beginning. The image of micro-financing has plummeted and women, who were supposed to receive the benefits of micro credit, are the worst sufferers since these loans are given to them.

The plight is compounded by the

fact that many rural women hand over the funds to their husbands to invest in income generating activities and, in the end, become helpless and burdened with debt. This scenario, which is common in recent times among a widespread rural population of the country, has proved the futility of implementing micro-financing in our country, despite its good intentions. It is home-based work, or any other form of income-generating activity, that can help a person earn something through the micro-credit.

Bangladesh's stride towards economic upliftment, despite all sorts of socio-politico-economic obstacles, is possible only due to the hard-working marginal people of this country. Women, specially, should be given the credit. Although home-based workers contributed about Tk 150 billion to the GDP, their contribution in the national economy is ignored, or not counted. The contribution could be increased if a planned initiative is taken, evaluating their inputs to the national economy.

Nazrul Islam is a journalist and environmentalist.

Finally, Rumsfeld is out

His stubbornness has finally given a chance to his longtime adversary, Condeleezza Rice, to further entrench her position by the appointment of her confidant, former CIA chief Robert Gates, as the new defense secretary. This not only means the end of the Rumsfeld chapter, but also a change in US strategy in Iraq in the coming days as President Bush has welcomed Robert Gates with the "hope" that "he will provide a fresh outlook on our strategy in Iraq."

IMRAN KHALID

FINALLY, Donald Rumsfeld, the hawkish US defense secretary, has been compelled by circumstances of his own making to leave the corridors of the Pentagon. Indubitably, he was among the most controversial US defense secretaries in the post-World War II period. His list of misadventures encompassed a wide range of incidents that have earned him the reputation of being a highly emotional, hawkish and seriously myopic politician.

Despite being the head of the Pentagon twice, he never really paid attention to molding his oratory skills to match the requirements of his job, which demanded him to show restraint and rationalization in his communications with the outside world. On innumerable

occasions, his unnecessary tongue-wagging and asinine statements made him the centre of media bashing.

On January 20, 2003, just before launching the Iraq invasion, Rumsfeld said: "His (Saddam's) regime has large, unaccounted-for stock-piles of chemical and biological weapons, including VX, sarin, mustard gas, anthrax, botulism, and possibly smallpox. And he has an active program to acquire and develop nuclear weapons."

Later, on March 30, 2003, in the days after the fall of Baghdad, when asked whether he found it curious that US forces had not yet found weapons of mass destruction he said: "We know where they are. They are in the area around Tikrit and Baghdad and east, west, south, and north somewhere."

Similarly, when asked about

growing lawlessness in Baghdad after US troops captured the capital, Rumsfeld replied: "Stuff happens. It is untidy, and freedom is untidy. Free people are free to make mistakes, and commit crimes, and do bad things."

In fact, there is a very long list of such stuff that projected him as an "abysmal" orator, with little care for the implications of his words on the course of events. He was the chief architect of the Iraq policy that eventually led to the drubbing by the Democrats that stripped the Republicans of control of Congress in the US mid-term elections, mainly because of anger over Iraq.

From day one, his Iraq policy was being seriously challenged, not only by his opponents, but also



by a large majority of moderate Republicans. He kept on persuading President Bush to impetuously go into Iraq, with no plan to ensure stability after the departure of Saddam. It was certainly an extremely defective strategy that has so far yielded nothing but thousands of Iraqis' lives, along with 2,800 casualties among US troops -- and the electoral defeat of the Republicans.

The vision and approach of Rumsfeld is quite clear from the statement he issued just before the Iraq operation. He said: "The Gulf war in the 1990s lasted five days on the ground. I can't tell you if the use of force in Iraq today would last five days, or five weeks or five months. But it certainly isn't going to last any longer than that." The irony is that, instead of mollifying his stance, or accepting the responsibility for the mess created in Iraq and other places across the globe, Rumsfeld became more rigid with the passage of time.

The retired generals' revolt against President Bush's handling of the Iraq operation early this year was indirectly aimed at Rumsfeld. The rampant lawlessness, insurgency and intensifying sectarian fighting are the result of a

exceedingly defective strategy in Iraq, that even compelled President Bush to declare: "It is not working well enough, fast enough," after the resignation of Rumsfeld. There is little doubt that the innate stubbornness of his approach has been the key factor in Rumsfeld's failure at this stage of his political career.

Ever since he took over charge in his second stint as the Pentagon chief, there had been persistent, rumbling grouses against his misadventures which continued to follow him till the day he announced his resignation -- even after his departure, the echo of anti-Rumsfeld voices is being heard across the globe. There are hardly any of his counterparts in world capitals who have expressed any kind of regret after his exit.

"I was a bit worried that he was too bullish on the conditions in Iraq. Anti-US sentiment has heightened greatly in Iraq. Considering that, I wonder if he could have taken some measures to abate it," said Japan's Defense Agency Director-General Fumio Kyuma. Belgian Defense Minister Andre Flahaut welcomed the departure of Rumsfeld, whom he

described as "obstinate." Italian Prime Minister Romano Prodi said: "The resignation means the speeding up of a change in US politics." French Defence Minister Michele Alliot-Marie commented: "I think, without a doubt, that Donald Rumsfeld must have considered that the war in Iraq, in which he was very involved, was part of an electoral response by the American people, and that he drew the conclusions."

These remarks are enough to depict the image created by Rumsfeld among his counterparts. Rumsfeld has failed to re-visit and review his arrogant and hawkish approach towards world affairs. His stubbornness has finally given a chance to his longtime adversary, Condeleezza Rice, to further entrench her position by the appointment of her confidant, former CIA chief Robert Gates, as the new defense secretary. This not only means the end of the Rumsfeld chapter, but also a change in US strategy in Iraq in the coming days as President Bush has welcomed Robert Gates with the "hope" that "he will provide a fresh outlook on our strategy in Iraq."

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The party of flawed thinking

AL desperately needs to revise its thinking pattern. One of the areas they could focus on, instead, is getting access to the voter list. Without this in hand, and with only two months to election, it is beyond me as to exactly how the reported 10 million plus false voters will be identified; particularly when it is quite clear that the present Election Commission will not be doing so.

SAFI KHAN

OF Bangladesh's 35 years of existence, around 16 years have been controlled by BNP, 9 or so by Jatiya Party, and roughly 8.5 years by AL. Of the last 15 years, 10 have been ruled by BNP and 5 by AL. Thus, based on the numbers

alone, one might crudely conclude that the primary responsibility for the country's mis-governance lies with BNP (though let us not take anything away from the AL or JP).

With the country in such a sorry state, one would have thought that even a half-baked party would have any number of

issues to campaign on, with a never-ending series of opportunities to mobilize the electorate. Yet, when it comes to the AL, they continue to struggle at the polls. Why?

The aversion towards the AL stems in large part from the age group that experienced their rule during 1972-75. But, that was

over 30 years ago. The vast majority of the present voting population was too young, or not even born, at the time. The bogey of Baksal is probably not as significant anymore. Yet the AL continues to rub voters the wrong way with a combination of utter stubbornness, and sheer folly, for want of a better expression.

Just look at what has happened with the chief advisor position. If AL had not tinkered with the promotion of judges, whereby Chief Justice Hasan was superseded not once but twice, he would not even be in consideration for caretaker

head. He would have long retired, with other CJs retiring after him. Now, thanks to their agitation, they have a seemingly partisan president occupying this all-important post.

Based on most accounts, there is little criticism of CJ Hasan's performance as a judge. What AL primarily objected to was his past political association with BNP. That being the case, what fails to make sense is why the AL initially accepted the president's taking over the chief advisor's post. If CJ Hasan was guilty because of his political association 20 years ago, why was the president also not sub-

jected to this standard?

Even if we disregard reports of the president's partisanship, the fact that his wife was awarded the permission for opening a private university during his presidency is surely sufficient cause for concern. The president was also, at one time, the University Grants Commission chairperson. This alone would have given them undue advantage. Under these circumstances, the perception that the application may have undergone a less than rigorous evaluation is more than justifiable. The president being the chancellor, and his wife the vice-chancellor of a

university is also a textbook case of conflict of interest.

When the AL was campaigning against Chief Election Commissioner Aziz did they even consider that another, possibly even less acceptable, candidate could fill the position, similar to what took place with the chief advisor? Funnily (or sadly) enough, a former justice, in whose compound the authorities were reported to have discovered illegal arms during Operation Clean Heart, has stepped into the CEC's shoes. As AL has found him also to be "unacceptable," does it mean that they will be back on the

streets? Going by BNP's track record, there will not be a dearth of such people for them to agitate against.

AL desperately needs to revise its thinking pattern. One of the areas they could focus on, instead, is getting access to the voter list. Without this in hand, and with only two months to election, it is beyond me as to exactly how the reported 10 million plus false voters will be identified; particularly when it is quite clear that the present Election Commission will not be doing so.

Safi Khan works in development.