

Hardly Any Relief

The US-British airstrikes on Iraq have been halted as suddenly as these had been launched. Not only has no good purpose been served by the aerial blitzkrieg, if you will, it has, in fact, complicated the over-all situation enormously. Objective conditions have become far worse than before so that any early resolution of the UNSCOM inspection row has to be ruled out. Only an abandonment of the military option can help turn the tide.

The use of force has hardened the Iraqi position into proclaiming that the UNSCOM 'mission is over' and no more weapons inspections would be allowed into Iraq. But since the US and UK have made the lifting of sanctions on Baghdad absolutely contingent upon certification by the UNSCOM that the weapons have been eliminated, the issue has obviously become more complex, and far more contentious than before.

The attacks have practically strengthened the Iraqi regime in its resolve to remain defiant — exactly the opposite of what Clinton and Blair had set out to quash. The once-isolated and friendless Saddam has evoked Arab sympathy, even Kuwaiti support — thanks to the punishing air raids made on the eve and into the month of Ramadan. What is of greater intrinsic value is that the majority members of the UN Security Council have expressly criticised the airstrikes, thereby strengthening the belief worldwide that indeed the US and UK could not have carried any conviction with what they were doing despite their rhetoric flourish in its defence.

We have two lessons to draw from this sordid episode: first, the US-British action has not only been immoral and ineffective it has also been illegal in the eye of international law because the attack was launched without the full backing of the UN Security Council. Furthermore, the core issue here being the implementation of certain UNSC resolutions it was all the more necessary that the Security Council was consulted before mounting the military attack on Iraq. What has happened hardly augurs well for a new international political order.

Whatever respite we have got must now be used to help find a diplomatic solution to the tangle so that the suffering Iraqi people can be saved from a wholesale ruination.

Illogical Fuel Prices

As the giant oil companies of the world are battling hard to maintain their existence in the market due to the plummeting crude prices, Bangladeshis continue to pay exorbitant sums of money for petroleum products. And the most disturbing news, according to The Daily Star report, is that the government is in no mood to consider lowering of fuel prices. When the decision to raise the prices dramatically was announced by three powerful ministers, two of them people's representatives, in August 1997, the logic behind it was very clear: crude oil prices in international market was soaring and it was selling at \$24-25 per barrel. There had to be an upward adjustment. The ministers, however, assured the consumers that prices would be reduced if and when the international oil prices went down. Since then crude prices have shown a steady downward trend triggering turmoil in the oil business but have failed to nudge the government into passing on the benefit to domestic consumers. This amounts not to merely renegeing on a promise but also turning a blind eye to basic economic considerations.

Petrol and petroleum products are of primary importance to any country for the growth of industry, trade and commerce and power, communication and other infrastructures. On the pricing of oil and oil products depends the rise or fall of inflationary pressure in a country. Logical pricing of fuel and other petroleum products will have tremendous impact on the production costs that can help arrest the present spiralling of prices of various commodities in the local markets. The lame excuse that Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation suffered huge losses can not be justified from their business records of 1991-2 to 1995-6. During these years they made handsome profits and also paid huge taxes to the public exchequer.

We strongly feel that the ministers should redeem their pledges on reducing the petroleum prices since there has been a drastic fall in the international prices almost by a half. Surely the government is not expected to behave like those who jack up the prices never to bring them down.

Crime on the Campus

The Dhaka University authority's decision to suspend a teacher accused of sexually harassing a female student has established the fact that teachers, no matter how high an esteem they may be held in society, are not above the law. Teachers are supposed to be the guardians of students, and any act of indiscretion by the former against the latter should naturally invoke a great deal of revulsion in the public mind. Dr Shahiduzzaman of the department of international relations was accused last month of having sexually harassed a student. The teacher has stoutly defended his innocence and called the whole thing a "conspiracy". But the probe committee set up by the DU authorities has found enough evidence to take action.

The students themselves have launched a campaign to expose teachers who may be indulging in the same loathsome activity. If the sentiments of ordinary students are any indication, then it is clear that sexual harassment is not an isolated event, nor one confined to one teacher in one department. In that context, what is surprising is not that a teacher has been found guilty of sexual harassment, but that it has taken so long for this matter to come to public light.

The problem here is that, the misdemeanour of a few teachers now threatens to tarnish the image of the academic community as a whole. This is what the DU authorities need to guard against. But guarding the reputation of the teaching profession must not involve any attempt to cover up the extent of the problem. On the contrary, the authorities should immediately respond to the concern expressed by students, and launch a probe into the issue as a whole, rather than just against one teacher. A comprehensive investigation and rapid action can cleanse the campus of this perversity, and preserve the reputation of the academic community. The DU must establish the principle that sexual harassment by teachers is not acceptable, and any indulging in such activities would face expulsion and criminal proceedings.

First US President in Palestine

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THE latest visit of US President Bill Clinton to Palestine is a unique event and cannot be described by the classical term "historic". It is epoch making.

President Bill Clinton was accompanied by his wife First Lady Hillary Clinton and daughter Chelsea. During this trip the President visited Israel and Palestine.

This was his fourth official visit to Israel and must be classified as a normal routine visit. He held talks with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and members of his cabinet and promised more funds to Israel. As is expected from an American President, Bill Clinton laid stress on US commitment towards Israeli security.

President Bill Clinton's visit to Palestine was of a totally different kind. US and Palestine do not have diplomatic relations. By visiting Palestine Bill Clinton became the first US President to do so and he said so in a statement that he was the first President to visit Palestine areas controlled by the Palestinians. Thus it went far beyond the classical recognition for no less a person than the US President was the guest of the Palestinian authority.

President Clinton has held talks with Chairman Yasser Arafat in his office in Gaza. He has spoken to a select audience of members of Palestine Na-

tional Council, which was earlier addressed by Chairman Arafat. Arafat in his highly emotional address called upon the council members to declare by a show of hands that they were removing forever a clause from their Charter relating to the destruction of Israel. Spontaneously the council members stood up and by a show of hands approved the proposal of Chairman Arafat.

The atmosphere in the hall was electrifying and President Clinton was visibly moved. Departing frequently from his written text he stated "the people of Israel have been working for peace for a long time. Clinton repeated it three times as if to go over the head of Israeli leadership, who have paralysed the peace process. Praising the leadership of Arafat, he pointed out that the real architect of the peace process was Chairman Arafat. In his remarkable speech President Bill Clinton put for the first time in the history of US-Israeli relations, the Israelis and the Palestinians on the same footing.

He spoke about Jews in America as Arabs in America and 'Islam was the fastest growing religion in America'. President Clinton underlined that as Israel had a right to exist in se-

curity so did the Palestinians.

It is now clear like daylight that this is a major shift in US policy. Successive US governments have been working tirelessly for a solution of the Middle East conflict. Since Camp David of 1979 during the Presidency of Jimmy Carter, the US has been deeply engaged in finding a solution to this in-

tractable dispute. Where Democratic President Carter had left, Bill Clinton, another Democrat, in the White House after 12 years, has picked up the pieces and pushed the peace process forward. And the peace process had a reasonable smooth run during the predecessor of Netanyahu.

Ever since Netanyahu took over, he has done everything possible to damage the peace making efforts of the US. Netanyahu seems not to believe in give and take. For him, it is only take and not give. Thus af-

ter the Palestine Council declared elimination of the clause from the Charter relating to the destruction of Israel. Netanyahu declared that it was not enough.

President Clinton has spent more time and funds on the Middle East Peace Process than any other US President. The result was the Wye River accord in October last. With the help of President Clinton, Arafat and Netanyahu signed a deal that in exchange for 13 per cent land for the Palestinians, Israel would receive full guarantee for her security.

Hardly the ink on the paper was dry that Netanyahu started raising new roadblocks thus effectively nullifying the peace process. It is, no doubt, due to his extreme frustration that President Bill Clinton in his speech before the Palestine Council has stretched his hand towards the Israeli public over

the head of their leaders.

The first-ever visit of a US President to Palestine administered land will remain a milestone in the Middle Eastern politics of America. Chairman Arafat has said several times that he will declare the birth of the new state of Palestine by May 1999, the last date for the five-year period of the Oslo Accord.

It is difficult to understand what reason Arafat has for declaring the birth of a new state. The state of Palestine exists since many years and the Palestinians have been in the business of running their state for long. They have Embassies all over the world including in Bangladesh. In Bangladesh the Palestinian Ambassador is the Dean of the Diplomatic Corps, by virtue of his seniority.

Palestine has more Embassies around the world than Israel has. And now to crown all Palestine has received virtual recognition from the sole superpower — the US through the visit of President Clinton on soil controlled by them.

Palestine should concentrate on mutual recognition with Israel. There is precedent in the case of mutual recognition between Bangladesh and Pakistan. Bangladeshu

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman had laid down the principle that he would visit only such countries that accorded recognition to Bangladesh. In February 1974, an OIC Summit was held in Lahore. Some Arab countries among whom Algeria was in a leading position, urged Bangladeshu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman to attend the Summit. I was Bangladesh Ambassador in Algiers. Mutual recognition was announced between Dhaka and Islamabad and President Houari Boumedienne sent his plane to carry Bangladeshu from Dhaka to Lahore.

In his farewell press conference President Bill Clinton has stated that his visit to the area has been a success. The peace process has remained stuck where it was. Benjamin Netanyahu has remained frozen in his position. He is not willing to give up land as stipulated in the Wye Accord.

Yet a sea-change has taken place in the Middle East. The US has as good as accorded diplomatic recognition to Palestine. More important, US tilt towards Israel is gone and must have been replaced by an even handedness never seen before. The Middle East will never be the same again. No wonder there is celebration in the West Bank and Gaza.

(This article was written prior to US-UK attack on Iraq and impeachment of President Clinton).

The Horizon This Week

Arshad-uz Zaman



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Lies upon Lies: Clinton's Justification for Bombing Iraq

by Mohammad A Auwal

Dennis Halliday, who ran the UN oil-for-food programme in Baghdad until he realized that thousands of Iraqi children were dying every month because of sanctions, resigned saying, "We are in the process of destroying an entire society. It is illegal and immoral."

PRESIDENT Clinton gave a passionate speech for 'peace' to the Palestinians in Gaza on December 14, saying "No matter how sharp a grievance or how deep a hurt, there is no justification for killing innocents." Just two days after that sermon, he began the most massive bombing campaign in human history. Sunday's television news reported that more bombs and missiles had been hurled on Iraqi targets over the past three days than during the long-drawn US and allied attacks in 1991. In sharp contrast to the sermon given to the Palestinians, Clinton justified the killing of the innocent Iraqi people in his declaration of war speech to the Americans.

The "evidence" cited in his speech and the spinning it received in the media outlets sparked a patriotic passion among the American people, demonizing Saddam Hussein as the incarnation of an ultimate evil. Few Americans questioned the fact that the US held Hussein to a standard of cursing and denunciation that they did not apply even to Slobodan Milosevic, the Hitler-type dictator of Serbia. Fewer still wanted to believe the "wag the dog" theory that the American president would seek to divert attention from his impeachment hearings by spending millions of dollars and imperilling the lives of American

soldiers. Yet, belatedly descriptions of an edifice of lies behind the decision to bomb are coming out of some high-credibility people. Scott Ritter, a former American marine, resigned in August as head of the UN inspection team's (UNSCOM's) Concealment Investigation Unit to protest the US administration's interference in the team's activities, said in an interview to the New York Post December 15 that the US officials prodded the UNSCOM to "generate a conflict that would justify a bombing."

He said, "What Richard Butler (the UNSCOM chief) did last week was to set up." He further said, "If you did around, you'll find out why Richard Butler yesterday (Dec 14) ran to the phone four times. He was talking to his (US) national security adviser. They were telling him to sharpen the language in the report to justify the bombing." An AP report (December 17) says that President Clinton discussed preparation for an attack on Iraq with Israel's Prime Minister Netanyahu earlier in the week. After seeing off Clinton, Netanyahu said, "He [Clinton] told me that he was about to get a very difficult re-

port by Richard Butler on Iraq's failure to fulfil its commitments, and that it apparently would obligate him to act." Another by Barton Gellman in Washington Post on December 16 said, "Sources in New York and Washington said Clinton administration officials played a direct role in shaping Butler's text during multiple conversations with him Monday to the United Nations. Spokesmen for Butler and Clinton administration declined to comment on those conversations."

Yet another story by Rowan Scarborough in Washington Times of December 17 related this: "The White House notified the Joint Chiefs of Staff on Sunday (Dec 13) that President Clinton would order air strikes this week, 48 hours before he saw a United Nations report declaring Iraq in noncompliance with weapons inspectors. It was learned from authoritative sources last night." These revelations are consistent with the fact that since the beginning of the UN inspections the US has kept insisting on UNSCOM to prove that Iraq does have weapons of mass destruction in order to prolong the sanctions.

In February 1998, the Clinton administration was poised to bomb Iraq into ashes, claiming that Iraq had hidden huge chemical and biological weapons in 62 palaces. The UN inspectors later found no trace of weapons in those palaces. Earlier revelations confirmed Iraq's long-standing allegations that UNSCOM was infiltrated with Israeli Mossad agents.

Upon resigning as the head of UNSCOM's Concealment Unit, Scott Ritter disclosed that he sought and received Israel's help in tracking down Iraqi weapons. A few months ago, too, Richard Butler vehemently argued that Iraq loaded the swift-killing nerve agent into missile warheads. He produced a US army laboratory test of the warheads to corroborate his claims. Swiss and French analysts later found no evidence of VX nerve gas on the same missile parts.

In other words, the US was instrumental in the writing of Butler's final report it used to justify the bombing. The contents of the report were leaked before it was submitted to the Security Council that was in session when the bombing

started.

And the justification for the attack is both spurious and outrageous. Spurious not only because of the above UN interpolations in the "truth" sought by the UNSCOM but also because of some logical holes in Clinton's argument. Clinton argued that the mission of the strikes "is to attack Iraq's nuclear, chemical and biological weapons programmes and its military capacity, to threaten its neighbours."

In fact, the US didn't consider Iraq a threat even before the Gulf War when its war machine was intact. The US forces destroyed 80 per cent of Iraq's military capability and infrastructure, by dropping 88,500 tons of bombs in 110,000 unchallenged sorties in 1991. The UN inspection teams have since destroyed 90 per cent of the remaining capability. Now, his cruise missiles shot from about a thousand miles away were destroying the "weapons of mass destruction" that UNSCOM teams could not locate in eight years of search! The justification to attack Iraq, then, is much like that of the wolf to the lamb in a fable. From his up-

stream position, the wolf accused the lamb, who was sipping in a downstream spot, of making his water dirty. When the lamb replies that scientifically he could not have made his water dirty even if he wanted to do so. Defeated in the argument, the wolf justifies that one of the lamb's forebears "must have done it" and so he had to pay for it by his life.

The justification to attack Iraq is an edifice of lies constructed by Bill Clinton, with the faithful assistance of Richard Butler. Preoccupied with preserving their political hide, they hardly realize what the agony is like to suffer "the slings and arrows of an outrageous fortune". They do not understand that it is nauseatingly inhumane to isolate a people from the rest of the world, starve them for eight years, and subject them to a high-tech carnage. As pathological liars, the Clintons and Butlers have problems realizing why Dennis Halliday, who ran the UN oil-for-food programme in Baghdad until he realized that thousands of Iraqi children were dying every month because of sanctions, resigned saying, "We are in the process of destroying an entire society. It is illegal and immoral."

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Revenge of the Chainsaw Republicans

President William Jefferson Clinton, trimmer, schemer and leading light of the survival-at-any-cost school of political leadership, is facing his nemesis. Gemini News Service analyses the forces that face "Slick Willy" as he prepares to confront his accusers.

Cliff Hopkinson writes from New York.

Republicans appeared blind to the solid expression, in poll, of the public will. One intense week showed the nature of their fury more nakedly than before. In Washington, DC, before the House Judiciary Committee, the president's case was argued by distinguished lawyers and academics, among them a former US attorney general, deputy attorneys general, former government prosecutors, members of the team that investigated the ineptitudes of President Nixon, and revered professors of constitutional and criminal law.

They were all so solemnly agreed: Clinton's behaviour has been bad. He has been evasive under oath, misleading a court, a grand jury inquiry and the public, and has betrayed his family and colleagues by lying to them. However, no responsible prosecutor would mount a perjury case against him, say these experts, because it would fail for lack of evidence.

On this basis alone, they say, Clinton and the country should be excused the agony of an impeachment trial in the Senate. And in all events, they add, Clinton's offence does not rise to the level of high crimes and misdemeanours which is the impeachment test laid down in

the constitution by the founding fathers.

In the minds of the founders, ironically, perjury was never an issue. For not until the Reconstruction, when rebel states were re-established after the Civil War, was oath-taking broadly adopted in the courts. Until then it had been expected that witnesses would lie to suit their purposes.

Representative Henry Hyde, Republican of Illinois, a tall, 74-year-old lawyer with plentiful wings of white hair swinging back from a brow like a cliff, has presided over the initial stages of Clinton's planned downfall. He promised that the Judiciary Committee, which he chairs, would be objective, bipartisan and expeditious.

Certainly it was expeditious. It was also highly partisan: Republicans for impeachment, Democrats for censure.

In two days of evidence, the president's defenders planted thickets of legal arguments, restraint and warnings between the committee and Clinton.

"Hairsplitting" retorted the committee's Republican majority. The Democrats, impassioned but helpless in their minority, could only protest at the totally partisan nature of

events as the Republicans, like a chainsaw gang, relentlessly cut away the well-argued defences, hacking through the thickets until they could lay their blades against the very trunk of the government's tallest tree.

Clinton, they freely said, was a liar and a perjurer who had tampered with witnesses and obstructed justice. He had attacked the rule of law and must be impeached.

The probability is that by Christmas, the articles of impeachment have been approved by the House and sent on to the Senate. And there, presided over by the Chief Justice of the United States, would ensue the trial of William Jefferson Clinton, the first president to be so tried since Andrew Jackson in 1868 and only the second in the history of the nation. Many argue that such a trial would paralyse government, maybe for months, impede the business of the Supreme Court through the absence of the Chief Justice, and subject the people to an agony in which their president would be pilloried and the particulars of his affair with Lewinsky examined in all their lewd detail.

Nothing Clinton has done, say his defenders, justifies this.

There has been no bribery, no treason, no subversion of government, no murder, no rape. A man has erred shamefully but in his private, not his presidential, capacity. Nothing in the constitution requires impeachment here.

Clinton's attackers, unwilling to let up, chant a common litany: Clinton has lied on oath in court and before a grand jury and thus is a threat to the rule of law. They want his head.

Unable to manage decapitation at this stage, however, they are trying to cut off the legs — to carve up Clinton so mercilessly that he is immobilised as a leader.

It is hard to resist the idea that there is a strong revenge motive here: revenge for the poor showing of Republicans at the last election despite the scandal of the Lothario in the White House; revenge for the departure of the fallen hero Newt Gingrich, maimed by the poor election results; for the earlier defeat of George Bush; for Iran Contra, even for Watergate and the demise of Nixon.

How Clinton will emerge from this travesty is only partly predictable. Perhaps his most elegant solution would be to resign to save the country further delay and division. He says no.

the idea of resignation has never crossed his mind.

Politicians on both sides have said he might save himself from trial by confessing to lying. Unlike 80 per cent of Americans, however, Clinton insists that he doesn't believe he lied. He sticks to the narrow legalistic defences that, while they beggar belief, are designed to save him from possible criminal prosecution for perjury once he leaves office. In other words, his only defence is to continue his misleading evasions about the Lewinsky affair. It is shabby stance for a president and he must know it can demean him in the eyes of history — a considerable punishment for a man so greatly concerned with his political legacy.

And if he does pass through the eye of the impeachment storm, what of the remainder of his presidency? His legislative muscle weakened, he will probably be unable to achieve his trumpeted goals of strengthening the social security system and improving the quality of education. The visionary Road to the Twentieth Century that he conjured up on his ride to re-election two years ago must now appear to him a road less inviting. It seems likely that he will travel it as a lame duck whose once brave words have turned to quacks.

The writer has been an executive with The Observer and the Daily Mail in London, deputy editor of US News and World Report in Washington.

To the Editor...

"Poor Doctors"

Sir, So, Dr Sabrina Q Rashid believes whoever writes or replies in response to her letters is being 'rude' and 'they seem to be more popular whose letters get printed promptly' as if people in newspapers have no sense at all?

In response to her letter on 14 December, 1998, allow me to say something. Dr Sabrina has been repeatedly going on accusing the educated general public through a number of dailies branding our society with various adjectives beginning from 'being rude' to 'unsocial'.

It is about time she stopped being a doctor, and become an ordinary person posing herself to be an ordinary patient to visit an 'equally qualified doctor' and find the ins and outs of patient-and-doctor relationship.

She writes: 'This is Bangladesh style of judgement. What is this comment supposed

to mean anyway?

We fail to understand why she mentions about the 'people' of India with missing kidneys when here in our country a helpless young woman's kidney (Asma Begum) got removed without anyone's knowledge by our experts.

Mujibul Hoque
Mirpur Road,
Dhaka

Compromise, not contention

Sir, Opposition Leader Begum Khaleda Zia has threatened to call hartal even during Ramadan to unseat the government, if price hike is not arrested. General Ershad will launch his programme to unseat the government after Eid. People of Bangladesh have seen both of them rule this country — they could not do much either to mitigate the sufferings

of the people.

So, why only clamour for mid-term election in the name of suffering of the mass which will deplete the exchequer of this poor country further. There are many other ways in democracy to keep the ruling party on track. "Tit for tat" is not the ultimate answer. Compromise, not contention is the essence of democracy. It is needed for greater interest of the country and its people.

Abul K Shamsuddin
Toronto, Canada.

Find the dishonest

Sir, It is a very piece of important information for us that the peace and anti-hartal activists are serious in promoting public awareness among the people that they request the government for genuine investigation in dishonesty of the

officials and so-called intellectuals who have accumulated huge amount of money. We firmly believe that nobody can escape the law of the land as evidenced in the recent action of the government.

Student demand against the dishonesty of high officials is on rise. This is a welcome sign. Like Indonesia, situation may arise at any time in our country if we fail to take appropriate steps in this regard.

Let us hope that our government takes timely action for peace and progress in the country. Such investigations against the social enemies should be further expedited.

AR Khan

45, Mohakhali, Dhaka

US, the terrorist

Sir, We strongly feel that the US air strikes against Iraq is uncalled for and inhuman. How

long would the millions of people of Iraq go on starving and without medical care due to UN economic sanctions initiated and backed by the US?

We wonder and are very much shocked as to why USA is trying to remove or kill President Saddam Hussein who enjoys a vein of support among his people and also the Arabs resentful of America's support of Israel.

Is not this policy of the United States a violation of human rights and tantamount to an act of terrorism?

O.H. Kabir

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Garbage and hawkers

Sir, The DCC has spent a lot of money to build overbridges for safe and easy crossing of the

pedestrians. But it is a matter of regret that the bridge at Fakir-e-pool is flooded with all sorts of garbage. The other bridge at Farmgate is always blocked by hawkers which makes the bridge too narrow to walk. On the other hand, most of the city streets are blocked with huge demountable garbage containers.

I am a frequenter to Nakhla-para near the Holy Cross School. The road is too rough and covered with filth. The rotten smell garbage makes the environment unhygienic and unbearable. For this DCC and the people of this area are equally responsible.

Therefore it is my earnest request to the authority and people of the area to take necessary step and make our city worth living.

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