

Middle East Sliding Towards War?

There are myriad terrorist organisations and movements ready and willing to provide the provocation to start the war. The pace of slide towards war was indeed accelerating from early November when both Arafat and Saddam moved to exploit as much as possible the Qatar Summit of the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) in order to mobilise the entire Arab world to support the war. It is now to be seen how and when exactly the final hour would, if at all, be struck.

THE Syria-sponsored Hizb Allah guerrilla activities in southern Lebanon and beyond had already been the most likely catalyst for a conflict in the region. Later the danger also of the Palestinian Intifada Alqsa escalating into a wider conflict existed from the beginning. The recent Iraqi force movements towards the borders of Jordan, Syria and Saudi Arabia could as well spark a conflagration engulfing whole of Middle East in its flame. There seems to be a consensus now among the intelligence services of Israel, the United States, Russia and several Arab states that the Middle East is rapidly and inexorably moving towards a regional war. While the latest developments in Middle East led Israeli military and intelligence leaders to establish a de facto unified wartime high command with the tacit support of Israeli political leaders, the neighbouring Arab countries are awash with militancy, a posture not seen since the populist hysteria on the eve of the 1967 six-day war.

At the core of this development is the cumulative impact of a understanding between two longtime allies - Iraqi President Saddam Hussain and Palestinian Authority (PA) President Yassir Arafat - to bring about the destruction of what they perceive to be a weak and vulnerable Israel. Added to this are the desires of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak to exploit the current Middle East crisis in order not only to empower himself as the regional leader, but also, some analysts believe, to empower his son, Gamal, as his heir to the Egyptian leadership.

A major threshold in this direc-

tion was crossed in early November last year with a significant change in the policy of Saudi Arabia. Formally, Riyadh only changed its posture vis-a-vis Iraq but this change has affected the whole region in more than one way. Saudi Arabia has now opened its border with Iraq and begun a process of normalisation with Baghdad. The change was the result of recent movement of Iraqi armed forces near Saudi and Jordan-Syrian borders. Because of the US and Israeli 'red lines' the Iraqi force movement threatened to place Saudi Arabia in a tacit alliance with the US and Israel - an untenable position to Riyadh. The only way for Saudi Arabia to neutralise the threat was through a sudden rapprochement with Saddam. Riyadh's move was capped by Cairo's decision to renew full diplomatic relations with Baghdad in the name of Arab unity at a time of crisis. Consequently the Arabs are now provided with two major advantages in their preparations for war. One, there would be no US military intervention from the bases in Saudi Arabia and secondly there can be an effective oil embargo if the Arabs want to use it as a weapon during a regional eruption.

Since late October, 2000 the Israeli National Security has been increasingly over the prospect of a regional war. An eerie uncertainty with regards to the future of the

peace process led Israeli military leaders and intelligence experts to undertake a war like preparations and the security leadership decided to pull together all the resources for both a major escalation of Intifada and an anticipated regional war dominated by Syria, Iraq and Egypt. The IDF (Israeli Defence Force) high command worried over the battered operational readiness

agreement with Israel by some of them.

On November 5, 2000 Israeli General Staff and the chiefs of the Mossad and Shin-Bet made a joint presentation in Israeli cabinet meeting challenging the validity of the government's reading of the current situation and particularly the likelihood of the revival of the peace process. On the contrary they

for the additional budget and permission to adopt other measures. According to General Mofaz and his staff the likelihood of a full-scale regional conflict is now greater than it has been anytime in the past. Syria is willing to go to war with Israel if its interest in Lebanon are damaged and is convinced that it could win such a war. While Iran is working behind the scene to bring about a regional escalation of the Palestinians and their allies are pushing for regime changes by overthrowing moderate Arab governments particularly where the Palestinians are in significant numbers.

The new Israeli intelligence assessment of the common interests of Saddam Hussain and Yassir Arafat is rather revealing. According to the analysts close to both leaders, both interpret the indecisive Israeli policy as vulnerability, and therefore a unique chance not only to take on Israel but also to avenge the 'past sins' of Arab rulers against both Iraq and PLO. President Saddam reportedly envisages a Ba'athist empire in Iraq's adjoining territories while a desperate Yassir Arafat dreams of a greater Palestine carved out of the parts of Israel, Jordan, Lebanon and Sinai the areas dominated by radical Muslims and the Palestinians. In the meantime the Iranians and Syrians consider the current conflict as an opportunity to change the regional balance of power in



PERSPECTIVES

by Brig (Rtd) M Abdul Hafiz

resulting from Barak's deep budget cut was convinced that Israel would require massive US air lift to fight a lengthy war. As a result the newly established unified wartime high command invited its US counterpart for a major informal discussion at the resort town of Eilat in early November last year to review and compare their regional threat assessment. From the meeting there emerged a consensus that the imminent threat to Israel was a combination of long range missile attacks from Iran and Iraq with the prospect of a regional war involving all of Israel's neighbours irrespective of the signing of the peace

projected their position as the first outward manifestation of the de facto unified wartime high command. The cabinet tacitly accepted this development because of its expediency. Ehud Barak would thus formally continue pursuing his peace process and avoid any formal alliance with Ariel Sharon while Israel's National Security professionals proceed with the preparations for war.

On November 7, 2000 the IDF Chief General Shaul Mofaz led a group of senior intelligence officers to the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee in order to warn it of an impending war and ask

Bush Presidency: Likely Ramifications at Home and Abroad

ON Saturday, January 20 George W Bush took over as the 43rd president of the United States of America. Curtain was rung down on the eight-year old Clinton era which will certainly be embedded as one of the most interesting and eventful in the saga of the Americans. Interesting because his second tenure was replete with such unbelievable sequences that he was about to lose his presidency over personal scandals and then just before relinquishing the charges dramatic events surrounded the election to the American presidency.

Never before in the long democratic history of the United States an election has been so much controversial in the sense that it took long 34 days after the voting to determine who won the highest office of the nation and that too through the intervention of the highest court of the country which also gave a split judgement on the issue favouring George W Bush. Clinton's personal matters rocked the Americans midway through his second term and there is hardly any parallel to such a romantic but dangerously overbearing penchant on part of a president who was impeached for misdemeanours and was about to be thrown out of the office but for the lack of approval at the Senate due to shortage of majority. Clinton was criticised and even condemned by most Americans and also abroad but once he received the reprieve he bounced back with greater aplomb and was now at the almost

President Clinton made a trip to this region early last year and sought to persuade India and Pakistan on the need for dialogue for reduction of tensions in the area. He, however, did not succeed much. Clinton described South Asia as a major international flashpoint because of acquisition of nuclear weapons in the region. It remains to be seen how the new administration deals with the tension-ridden populous region as a part of its avowed policy to promote peace across the globe.

zenith of his popularity when he laid down the office on January 20.

An emotional William Jefferson Clinton or Bill Clinton was almost on the brink of tears as he spoke in the final moments of his tenure as the president of the current world's only superpower. The era was marked by melodramatic events at times bringing into question the moral turpitude of the chief executive of the most powerful nation but it also saw enormous dynamism of the president of the United States who not only spared no efforts to give the Americans a good economy along with a sense of pride but also remained deeply entrenched in the international scene mainly in quest of resolution of the intractable conflicts. He was active almost tirelessly till the last day in the office for a settlement of the Middle East crisis and his seemingly inexhaustible energy nearly brought the crisis to a solution which is obviously very tough because of the complex nature of the tangle. Israeli foreign minister remarked on January 19 that his country and the Palestinians were close to peace than ever before. Whether a deal can be struck or not may still remain uncertain but there is no denying the fact that two sides were close to a peace deal as the outcome of commendable

efforts of Bill Clinton.

He not only tried his best to see that the two warring sides narrow their differences through bilateral discussions but also employed everything possible under his possession to wield considerable pressures on both. In the interna-

drop in crime rate.

Indeed, Bill Clinton would be remembered in the United States as one of the successful chief executives as far as his performance is concerned. New president George Bush's first problem obviously is to rise past the "suc-

cessful" image of the past president which is apparently monumental.

This success story was largely responsible for the good showing by defeated presidential candidate Al Gore who was vice president during the two tenures of Clinton. He won more popular votes than his rival but lost the race because of complex electoral system of the United States. Many feel Gore remains the real winner in the elections.

Bush has to start his task as the president with a "image problem" because he received less votes of the Americans than his rival did but won the White House because of a system that paradoxically



tional arena, Bill Clinton's performance is evidently a mixture of successes and failures but the success weighs heavily and the vexed Middle East crisis is a testimony to his unremitting endeavour to solve international conflicts. He called his era as "great American renewal" in his last official televised address profoundly thanking the American people for giving him two term opportunities to serve them. He touted his tenure's unprecedented economic growth with 22 million new jobs, the lowest unemployment in 30 years, and record home ownership, as well as health care and education initiatives and sharp

helped him. The legal battle that ranged from Florida state lower courts to federal Supreme Court finally favoured him. Bush moved to the White House with his wife Laura and twin daughters Jenna and Barbara for a stay that promises to be less turbulent than his predecessor's.

During the presidential campaign, Bush repeatedly said that he wants to "restore" the dignity of the White House. The catch phrase was clearly meaning Oval office encounters between Clinton and the White House intern Monica Lewinsky. Bush could swipe at Clinton on latter's personal affair but could seldom dig at his performance. Bush has to face the stark reality of effective governance. And this applies for both domestic and international affairs. Bush too does not have a spotless past as it was disclosed before the elections that once he was caught for driving in drunken condition and the licence was cancelled. However, he repeatedly mentions about commitment to family life.

Bush faces a daunting task at home to retain the economic progress of the past administration but he has an efficient and experienced team that should ably walk past the problems and demonstrate zeal to the American people. In the

their favour.

In any future conflagration the role of Egypt would however be crucial because of its powerful US-equipped Armed Forces. Traditionally Egypt is unavoidably a party to any Arab issue of consequence whether in peace or war. Given the incitement of the Egyptian population, it must participate in any Jihad or risk a popular or military uprising. President Hosni Mubarak is believed by analysts to want to use the impending crisis to get the Egyptian military establishment to empower his son, Gamal, as the country's next president. Mubarak is reportedly convinced that after the war neither Saddam nor Arafat will be accepted as all-Arab leaders by the rest of the world. Consequently Egypt would be able to step in as regional leader which would subsequently rehabilitate post war Arab world by rebuilding bridges to the west.

So at the core of the dangerous situation in the Middle East are the peculiar sets of interest of all key players in the region. All of them appear to be convinced that they could benefit from a conflagration involving other armies and leaders. On top of this there are myriad terrorist organisations and movements ready and willing to provide the provocation to start the war. The pace of slide towards war was indeed accelerating from early November when both Arafat and Saddam moved to exploit as much as possible the Qatar Summit of the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) in order to mobilise the entire Arab world to support the war. It is now to be seen how and when exactly the final hour would, if at all, be struck.

world affairs, Bush is relatively new having been Governor of Texas state and no exposure as such in the international matters. But his team comprises experienced persons including the secretary of state Colin Powell who have gained enormous ability because of their involvement in the administration of Bush senior the father of new president before Bill Clinton.

In Asia, many countries welcomed the Bush administration but there is also an impression that the new president may be a hard-liner towards China because of his pro-Taiwan policy and can also be a bit hawkish towards Iraq. But it will be done in haste so as to create new tensions making departure from the past accomplishments. The Middle East situation is also being closely watched.

For South Asia, the policy of the Bush presidency will be monitored from the beginning. A separate South Asian bureau was already set up in the state department. President Clinton made a trip to this region early last year and sought to persuade India and Pakistan on the need for dialogue for reduction of tensions in the area. He, however, did not succeed much. Clinton described South Asia as a major international flashpoint because of acquisition of nuclear weapons in the region. It remains to be seen how the new administration deals with the tension-ridden populous region as a part of its avowed policy to promote peace across the globe.

Shame

Ardeshir Cowasjee writes from Karachi

We are in deep mire and sinking deeper by the day. The photographs of our sole allies - blind, hooded, armed, hirsute, fierce - carried in the press are enough to frighten even those with the strongest of nerves. No one who wishes to live in peace and prosperity will consider investing in our country. Without keeping our allies well under wraps, or disassociating ourselves from them, and then reviving the economy we will get nowhere.

A FEW years ago I asked a question: How do we shame the shameless? The feedback overwhelmingly indicated that I was considered to be naive, and I was the butt of much laughter.

Yesterday I received by courier three bound files of papers with a covering letter purportedly from 'WAPDA Officers (For good management)'. The writers conveyed to me their salaams and told me that they had never imagined that I could be so naive as to imagine that General Pervez Musharraf and his men know nothing about the present high level corruption, which I maintained was drastically reduced. They also put it down to the ageing process, or to the desire to believe in someone, that I was under the impression that corruption at the lower levels had been somewhat reduced. They were sending me three volumes of documents 'painstakingly put together' which they suggested I study as the contents may change my opinion. This also would be material for one of my columns. The closing exhortation: "May you live long to see Jinnah's Pakistan once again."

Now, as would have said my late lamented old counsel, Dingom Ramchandani, who, when the true history of Pakistan is written, may warrant more than just a footnote: Lo and behold! The honest officers of WAPDA have not signed their letter, or identified themselves. Shame?

Why and how is it that we have leaders who have no concept of apology or atonement for their conduct? Take Jungle ke Badshah Bill Clinton, who, two days before he relinquished the most powerful office in the world, made the following statement: "I tried to walk a fine

line in between acting lawfully and testifying falsely, but I now recognize that I did not fully accomplish this goal and that certain of my responses to questions about Ms Lewinsky were false. I have apologized for my conduct and I have done my best to atone for it with my family, my administration, and the American people."

Our tin-pot Napoleons who have lied through their rotten teeth, robbed like rabbits on a spree, fleeced the nation and left it on its knees, are incapable of bringing themselves to make similar statements, to hide their heads in shame, and quietly disappear for ever from the national scene, rather than getting themselves arrested, jailed, pardoned, exiled, or having been convicted of corruption, allowed to tramp the free world making speeches unfavourable to their country to whatever forum beckons them? This might allow the country to make some progress. One of the multifarious tragedies of Pakistan is that it is a nation bereft of men or institutions to whom and to which the people can look up with any modicum of trust or respect. Let us start with former president of the republic, the obstinate, uncompromising, grim Ghulam Ishaq Khan, who, one could take a risk and say, was not personally financially corrupt. But one cannot say with full certainty that he was not as, whilst

in office, he allowed an open field to his two sons-in-law, Anwar Saifullah and Irfan Marwat, to abuse the national wealth and the people.

Ghulam Ishaq did right by dismissing Benazir Bhutto in 1990 on completion of her first round, together with her highly corrupt government. But then to ensure his own survival as head of state he imposed on Sindh as its caretaker chief minister no less a man than Jam Sadiq Ali, knowing fully well who and what he was and exactly what were his capabilities.

His mission in 1990 was to bring in Nawaz Sharif as prime minister, which he successfully did. His mission in 1993 was to dismiss Nawaz and his highly corrupt government. Having done that, he demeaned himself by collaborating with the same Benazir whom he had thrown out and for whom on many an occasion he had expressed his utter and absolute contempt. His mission was then to bring her back and whilst he was doing so he further demeaned himself by agreeing to include in his caretaker cabinet her disgraced and famously corrupt husband, Asif Zardari. Thereafter things went awry. A malleable Supreme Court brought Nawaz back and then a firm chief of army staff threw out both Ishaq and Nawaz.

Ghulam Ishaq is back in the news once more. Our world famous gold-

medal bedecked nuclear scientist, Abdul Qadeer Khan, has collected money from the people or collected from other monies to which he has access, to build within the grounds of the GIK University a mausoleum in which GIK will be put to rest when his time on earth runs out. Over Rs.5 million has been spent on this university project. Not believing what I had heard, I asked my friend, suspended speaker Ilaahi Bakhsh Soomro, a great supporter of GIK and now rector of the GIK U, whether there was any truth in it. He admitted that there was; the mausoleum stands on a hilltop for all to see and admire. I suggested to Ilaahi Bakhsh that he advise GIK not to make a fool of himself and not allow himself to be so degraded. Whether Ilaahi Bakhsh can bring himself to do this is questionable. My friend is flip-flopping, hoping finally to be the prime minister of Pakistan - and he may turn out to be a good one.

Back in time to Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. Aspiring politicians all over the world, even in sanctimonious Great Britain, wield flattery as a powerful weapon with which to worm their way upwards. For instance, as Richard Crossman, Labour MP and a Wykhemist to boot, used to say, "The way to become a minister is either to lick the arses of the leadership or kick them in the political goolies." (This

was quoted by Dalyell's biography of Crossman.) Few can be more adept at the art of flattery than was ZAB.

Rising young star ZAB in 1958 wrote a letter to President Iskander Mirza, by whom he had been sent as chairman of a delegation to the UN Conference on the Law of the Sea held at Geneva: "I would like to take this opportunity to reassure you of my imperishable and devoted loyalty to you. Exactly four months before the death of my late father, he had advised me to remain steadfastly loyal to you, as you were not an individual but an institution."

"For the greater good of my country, I feel that your services to Pakistan are indispensable. When the history of our country is written by objective historians your name will be placed before that of even Mr Jinnah. Sir, I say this because I mean it and not because you are the president of my country."

It worked. When Iskander and Ayub took over on October 7, 1958, Zulfikar was sworn in as a full-fledged minister in the first martial law cabinet.

Being a thoroughbred political animal, flip-floppy and of little character, he realized where power lay and, despite the fact that it was Iskander who was responsible for his rise, stayed on with Ayub Khan after Iskander was deposed and sent into exile. He ingratiated himself to such an extent that Ayub fondly

referred to him as his fifth son.

In 1976, in the fifth year of his rule over what was left of Pakistan, in a note to the chief of army staff on the subject of the elevation of General Ayub to the rank of Field Marshal, he claimed full credit for the master-stroke. In 1959, Ayub was apparently worried about the intrigues and ambitions of certain of his generals. It was ZAB who then advised, 'rather cynically' he said in his note, that since it was essential that Ayub be 'head and shoulders above the others' he should elevate his rank to that of Field Marshal, which Ayub Khan did soon after. Proudly he wrote "I am therefore the hero of Ayub Khan's valorous battles. Of course, the object of this note is not to dismantle the man. Some of us can still refer to him with respect. I am only setting the record straight." Hypocrite?

All of this is rather horrid and disgusting.

Now to business at hand. We are in deep mire and sinking deeper by the day. The photographs of our sole allies - blind, hooded, armed, hirsute, fierce - carried in the press are enough to frighten even those with the strongest of nerves. No one who wishes to live in peace and prosperity will consider investing in our country. Without keeping our allies well under wraps, or disassociating ourselves from them, and then reviving the economy we will get nowhere. The main news emanating from and about this country concerns Kashmir, terrorists, Shariah laws, interest-free banking, karo-kari, blasphemy laws - which is all rather deflating and discouraging. Kashmir and all that goes with it should be relegated to the backburner until we can pull ourselves up.