

## Bush must listen to world public opinion

*Give weapons inspectors more time*

THE 'awful majesty' of global public opinion is now a felt reality. Its elusive dream status has evaporated for the first time in human history. Thanks to unprecedented anti-war rallies breaking into a crescendo across 600 cities in the world, peoples are united in their resolve to reject the war-path against Iraq.

The beating of war-drums by the USA often resorting to pre-variation of a threat perception against an unequal must now drown in the thunder of the collective repudiation of the defeat-ist bellicose approach. The powerful demonstrations for peace cutting across cultures, religions and racial backgrounds have been a big gain to the new millennium by way of shaping its ethos, what if rather belatedly in the day.

The note of dissent delivered by a majority of UNSC members, the righteous concerns of the Arab world centring around the Palestine question, obsession with Iraq despite the defective North Korean rejection of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty and palming off of direct threats to the USA and the timely application of brake within the NATO have each played its role in bringing the peace option to the centre-stage of public discourse. In other words, it is crystallised world public opinion placing rule of law over 'might is right', in its widest possible manifestation, that has emerged triumphant. Such a robust expression of the people's anti-war sentiments has strengthened our faith in the humanity's unstoppable craving for peace to preserve what it has and build up on it.

Bush must now listen to world public opinion beginning with an open admission of the fact that anti-war demonstrations within his own country have been as intense as in other parts of the world. In spite of the powerful media resources, Bush has not had a sell-point with the public. At a time when the onus lay on the US and UK to justify their policy of forcing the pace against Saddam they have failed to make their point with convincing proofs.

However, Collin Powell's latest reiteration that war ought to be 'the last resort' perhaps signals a tapering of the desperation syndrome! British Prime Minister Tony Blair faces opposition within his own Labour Party on the war question, let alone the adverse British public opinion across the board. He, too, appears to be relenting before the force of reason.

Bush and Blair can only court isolation to their own peril -- they know it too well! Still, we urge them to come out of their cocoons and, by paying heed to world public opinion, give the UN inspectors more time to complete their job in Iraq. They are capable of doing it effectively. All they need is an enabling environment to clinch it. Abandoning the UN route will be simply suicidal.

## Arsenic in food chain

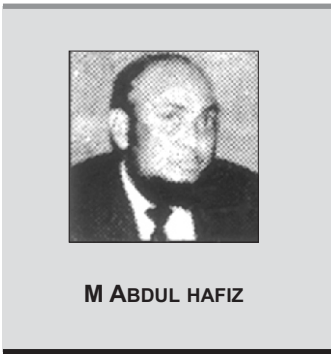
*What is delaying a comprehensive mitigation strategy?*

ESTIMATES of Bangladeshis exposed to high levels of arsenic vary from a low of 28-35 million to a high of 77 million, more than half the country's population. The World Health Organisation (WHO) describes arsenic contamination of groundwater as "the largest mass poisoning of a population in history" and the World Bank, as "one of the world's primary environmental challenges". The development partners have pumped millions of dollars into different arsenic mitigation projects since dangerous levels of the poison were detected in deep tube well water in 1993. The government and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have undertaken separate projects to raise awareness of arsenic contamination, mark out the affected tube wells, develop test kits and, to a limited scale, treat patients of arsenicosis. Still, a huge majority in the affected areas drinks the poisoned water. They have little choice.

While the mitigation efforts wobble along and the government struggles to come up with a comprehensive strategy, the arsenic crisis spreads its wings. Speakers at a recent international seminar have warned increased arsenic in soil and water may sneak into the food chain. What's more, naturally-occurring arsenic and arsenic-rich wastes, generated from a wide range of removal systems, which are often unsafe, pose a serious threat to public health. The speakers hit the nail on the head when they said although considerable work has been done on arsenic removal from contaminated groundwater and alternative water supply options, presence of arsenic in irrigation water has not received due attention.

Such a limited outlook on the arsenic crisis boils down to absence of a comprehensive national strategy. The government has to initiate more research on arsenic contamination, both direct and indirect. Alongside detection of arsenic-contaminated deep tube wells, development of test kits and filters and treatment of arsenicosis patients, it should sponsor research into the possibility of the silent killer sneaking into the food chain. In a paper, scheduled to appear this year in the Water Resources Research publication of the American Geophysical Union, the authors have concluded that replacing the most tainted wells with deeper wells will eliminate about 70 per cent of the illness, assuming arsenic levels remain low in the deep wells. However, the possibility of arsenic percolation into the food chain points to another scary aspect of the crisis. It's time the government shored up its arsenic combat strategy.

# Gulf-war II: Delayed or dropped?



M ABDUL HAFIZ

Sometimes ago, the European edition of *Time* magazine conducted an opinion poll to ascertain which country its readers consider to be the greatest threat to international peace and security expecting that their choice would be from among the countries of the 'axis of evil' declared last year by President Bush. To the magazine's surprise, out of 268,000 respondents 7.8 per cent said North Korea, 8.9 per cent named Iraq and a shocking 83.3 per cent thought it to be the United States. The organisers of the poll must have been non-plussed at the result but it did mirror the way the people brought to the most threatening country around the world except, of course, Britain and Israel and also partly explained why the US -- after yearlong war preparations, the mobilisation of huge number of troops and equipment in the Gulf region, the theatre of impending conflict, unprecedented diplomatic alacrity to drum up support and whipping up war hysteria already brought to a crescendo -- is now seemingly hesitant and holding back even in the presence of a casus belli of sorts -- the material breach of UN resolution number 1441 -- as claimed by the US itself.

This is also in spite of Iraq's utter helplessness before the mighty American forces which is still building up in a menacing posture. In military parlance a major attack is always preceded by a softening up of the objection. In case of Iraq, it has been done with total thoroughness pulverising the

country layer by layer through Anglo-American bombardment that began in the Gulf War of 1991 and never actually ended. The bombardment of Iraq lasted longer than US' war on Vietnam, indeed longer than combined duration of the two world wars. So much so that a UN mission in March 1991 described the allied bombing of Iraq as near 'apocalyptic' pushing a rather highly urbanised and mechanised society to pre-industrial age. Iraq suffered 145,000 dead in war and the subsequent sanctions were estimated to have killed more than half a million Iraqi children. These are apart from the

arbiter' faces a host of difficulties to face up to these facts. More so, when the world opinion is hostile and there is a lack of consensus among the allies. But the US' other methods for a regime change also did not meet with any success. The US' officials own up at least seven coup attempts that they instigated to remove Saddam. The failure of these attempts convinced the Americans that nothing short of a fullscale invasion would work.

All of Iraq initially and much of it subsequently was declared a 'no-fly zone' deliberately not to allow the country to fly its own aircraft in flagrant violation of Iraq's

1997. The US designs ended in fiasco when Chalabi fled to Britain while many of his followers were killed in battle with Iraqi troops.

After having tried several such stratagems it was not without reason that Americans finally opted for an all-out invasion of Iraq not knowing that they would face opposition to their gameplan from within the fraternity itself -- the transatlantic alliance. Although Iraq is accused of possessing WMO now after years of rigorous inspection it is no more a secret that Iraq was targeted for an invasion as back as in October 2001. As revealed by *International Herald Tribune*,

of South Iraq have all been repulsive to US' European friends. The NATO has broken its rank for the first time in last five decades over the question of providing air-defence to Turkey who as a member of the alliance invoked article 4 of NATO charter to be defended in the event of war breaking in its southern flank. France, Belgium and Germany, refused, in defiance of US' wish, to send air-defence contingent to Turkey. All permanent members of Security Council except the US and Britain are planning to block the latters' second resolution to authorise military action by counter-tabling resolution to give the

as the US' closest ally across the Atlantic. With the SPD coming to power under the aegis of Gerhard Schroeder it markedly distanced itself from the US in its policy particularly with regard to Middle East. During the recent visit to Berlin of Ronald Rumsfeld, Germany's leaders minced no words about their antiwar stance. The American allies in the Middle East region who vacillated between refusing to support war against another Arab country and again sheepishly agreeing to provide their bases and facilities -- perhaps under intimidation or on delivery of handsome largesse -- had rather been easier to handle. But it has been found much more difficult to manage their key-allies in Europe. Before embarking on a major war against a third world country it is undoubtedly a damper.

These behind-the-scene developments might have caused delay in Bush's much-touted war of regime change in Iraq, but can they altogether stop the war from breaking out? No, unless some miracle takes place. Because the Americans are so intoxicated with the war hysteria that they would go for it bypassing the NATO and even United Nations...That the US means it is proved by the fact that US' patriot missiles have started arriving in Turkey even without a consensus in the NATO. In the meantime President Bush has started addressing the troops in their bases and the diplomats are asked to leave the region -- all pointing to the possibility of a looming war. Only the peaceniks are keeping their fingers crossed as the Gulf region and beyond is going to be engulfed in a prairie fire that will be difficult to put down.

Brig (ret'd) Hafiz is former DG of BIISS.

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destruction and crippling of Iraqi industries and infrastructure. The total loss was estimated by the Arab Monetary Fund to be \$190bn. The country should now be ready to be walked over by an adversary!

Yet the US seems to be weighing the cost effectiveness of another devastating war. One of the reasons why the fullscale invasion which is overdue, given the US' brisk build up in the region, did not come sooner is that while the objective of the regime change and defeat of the Iraqi forces could be achieved quickly and with relative ease, the US has never been quite sure what would follow that victory. Although the neo-conservative right wingers that dominate the Bush administration give a damn to the human tragedies which will invariably accompany an invasion as they do to the threat perception of the *Time's* readers, America as the world's 'moral

sovereignty and without any basis in international law or a UNSC resolution. Under the cover of the 'no-fly zone' and incessant bombardment the US tried to install a parallel government of its choosing in the US-controlled Kurdish territory in Northern Iraq under the shadowy leadership of Ahmed Chalabi coming from monarchist Iraqi family overthrown in 1958. With a criminal background of embezzling funds from Jordan's Petra Bank for which he was sentenced to 34 years of hard labour by the Central Court of Amman, Chalabi is however a great favourite of Pentagon's superhawks who wanted to impose him on Iraq much the same way Hamid Karzai, an UNOCAL employee was imposed on Afghanistan. The CIA is said to have invested \$100m in propping up a Chalabi government which was routed by Iraqi Army in

(October 13, 2001) the Pentagon-based Defence Policy Board, a powerful bipartisan group of National Security experts, met for 19 hours on 19-20 September 2001 only after a week of terrorist attack in the US and the members of the board agreed "on the need to turn to Iraq as soon as the initial phase of the war against Afghanistan and bin Laden's al-Qaeda was over". This and many other credibility gaps in US' case against Iraq make its war plan to disarm Iraq dubious to the allies in Europe.

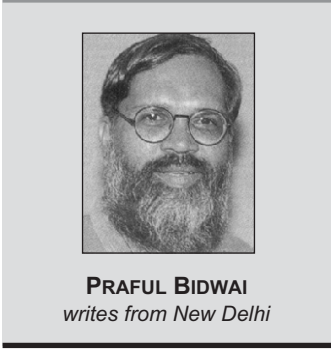
An over-hectored US -- its monopolising and editing of Iraqi dossier, its pre-judgements, its failure to publish evidence to support its claim of 'violations' and 'secret weapons', its highhanded treatment of other council members, its pressurising of Hans Blix who was, in any case, doing the US' bidding and its continued bombing

inspectors more time and resources to disarm Iraq by peaceful means giving primacy to diplomacy.

A few days ago, French Foreign Minister Dominique de Villepin warned that his nation would delay or might even veto efforts by the Bush administration to strong-arm the Security Council into a rushed war vote against Iraq. Germany, China and Russia backed France. The Americans expect their allies to be obedient and take orders from Washington. French initiative in adopting an alternative course to resolve Iraqi crisis appear to them downright insubordination. But ever since General De Gaulle Paris has refused to being a junior ally of the US and always tried to promote multilateralism.

Germany, Europe's largest country had once been the US' traditional ally and in post-war years it was about to take Britain's place

# Grave crisis in South Asian ties: Neighbours as enemies?



PRAFUL BIDWAI  
writes from New Delhi

Let's assume the worst about Pakistan. It meddles in Kashmir, funds the All-Parties Hurriyat Conference, and backs terrorists. Let's also accept that the major powers, especially the US, keep an eye on Pakistan's role as a *jehadi* "platform".

Let's add to this Gen Pervez Musharraf's public apprehension that after Iraq, Pakistan could become the US' next target, and his worry that support for Pakistan's India policy is running out in the Muslim world even as relations with India enter a deep crisis.

Given this, would it make sense for a high-ranking Pakistani diplomat like Jaleel Abbas Jilani to personally give Rs. 3 lakhs to a woman APHC representative (Anjum Habib)? He would have to be downright foolish.

Why wouldn't Mr Jilani, regarded highly, and known for impeccable manners, assign the job to others, including Kashmiri businessmen acting as conduits for militants?

Now consider the official Indian response to Habib's "confession". *The Telegraph* reports that she

complained the police "forced" her to name certain organisations, and shouted, "I have been betrayed". But let's leave that aside.

Should New Delhi have accepted the police version naming Mr Jilani in an FIR -- *without* verifying the facts? Should it have ignored the Special Cell's record vis-à-vis Iftikhar Gilani (the journalist detained for seven months on fabricated charges)? And worse, its "encounter" killings, like Ansar

judge what's cooking in Islamabad.

The expulsion's logic is to further downgrade, even close down, each other's missions -- as the BJP mindlessly demands. That will discredit India globally. If diplomacy is about conflict avoidance, then India is being extraordinarily un diplomatic.

The greatest casualty is the *principle of bilateralism* which India itself expounds. This is the foundation for the Shimla

complicated, fluid world, such rosy assumptions won't stand.

However, wisdom is at a discount in India's dealings with neighbours. Take Bangladesh. Mr L.K. Advani claims it has become an ISI "hub" and "infiltrated" 15 million migrants into India. He wants to detect and deport them -- as in Coochbehar, where 213 "snake-charmers" were brutalised for six days.

It is utterly irresponsible for a high functionary to allege the presence of

expected tens of thousands.

Large-scale illegal immigration cannot take place without corruption in the BSF, police and rationing offices. Hypocritically, our functionaries do nothing to cleanse the state, but everything to vilify suspected migrants.

Consider another hypocrisy. India is the source of 20 million-plus *pravasis* and migrants. Each year, *tens of thousands* migrate from India illegally. In 1999, the

our embassies' duty to protect these vulnerable people. We don't want them humiliated and deported. But we parade different positions on Bangladeshis.

Such double standards spring from arrogance. Many Indians imagine "we" -- not its people's struggles -- *created* Bangladesh.

It's also absurd to think that Dhaka encourages migration into India. Such allegations produce resentment against "Big Brother". Former Foreign Secretary Muchkund Dubey warns that India's anti-immigrant rhetoric is widely seen as "an attempt" to "larnish Bangladesh's image". Bangladeshis, says Mr Dubey, "are particularly resentful of the allegation that their country has become the hotbed of ISI activities" - after liberating itself from Pakistan.

Like its Pakistan policy, India's Bangladesh policy is largely determined by domestic-political considerations: the BJP wants to whip up xenophobia and raise the communal temperature to electoral ends.

The Vajpayee government must abandon this approach. It must upgrade India-Pakistan missions and open negotiations with Bangladesh on joint border-patrols and work permits.

"Beggar Thy Neighbour" is a bankrupt approach. A precondition for a country's security is good relations with its neighbours. Can we conceive of a happy India within an insecure, miserable neighbourhood?

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# Propaganda and protest

LOPA TASNEEM

People are still agonizing over the issue of the reasons behind the US decision to include Bangladeshis to register with INS. Is it really the so called "anti-Bangladesh propaganda" that is responsible for such decision of US?

After the incidence of 9/11, the view of Americans towards the Muslims has changed. Tight security measures are being taken by the US immigration and customs, especially against the Muslims. I do not want to go into the detail of US foreign policy that created the monsters like Bin Laden, but at the given situation I cannot blame US solely for taking precautionary measure for the safety of its citizens. Whether we like it or not after the 9/11 attack, the image of the Muslims has been jeopardized in the eyes of common US people. Even though these terrorists do not represent the majority of peace-loving Muslims of the world, it is unfortunate that all Muslims now have to share the repercussion of such irresponsible acts of terrorism committed by a few Muslims.

As far as Bangladesh is concerned, the fact remains that Bangladesh has the second largest Muslim population in the world. In the present scenario, it is only

natural that the West will keep an eye on Bangladesh. Our government hasn't taken any investigative measure to dig in the much publicised issue of the alleged existence of Islamic terrorist groups in Bangladesh, none of the bomb blast incidents in public places have been successfully investigated (people don't have a clue yet). Have our past or present government ever taken any corrective measure against the hateful preaching of our home-grown 'fundamentalists'? These are the things we have to keep in mind when we talk about our image abroad. The actions of our own government carry much more weight than some petition of HRCBM.

Maybe, certain sections of Bangladeshi and Indian population are trying hard to portray Bangladesh as an Islamic fundamentalist country to serve their own political interests. But Bangladesh has not all of a sudden turned into a "Taliban" country nor a deliberate act of "ethnic cleansing" of minority has been going on in Bangladesh. Some people are just taking advantage of the situation that Muslims are now being villainised by the western powers. India now tries to put focus on the existence of Al Qaida in Bangladesh for its own interest, so that its own religious

extremism and criticism of the recent Gujarat episode can be overlooked. Since we have no proof whether such publicity against Bangladesh had played a role in the minds of the US policy makers in their decision to include Bangladesh in the list of 25 countries, I would like to doubt such naïveté of US to believe in any baseless propaganda.

However, we should not mix one issue with the other. The gross deterioration of human rights condition in Bangladesh, government's disregard of court rules, harassment of journalists and opposition party members, corruption of the system, the recent indemnity ordinance, etc. should be protested equivocally for our own good. We should voice our protest to stop the undemocratic acts of government. But the deliberate attempts to portray Bangladesh as a fundamentalist 'terror risk' country and all Muslims as evil should be condemned too. The protest against violation of law and human rights abuse of government should by no means be categorised as anti-Bangladesh propaganda.

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## OPINION

# Democracy and the American double standard

SHAKIB AHSAN

In the post WWII world the USA took on the noble job of promoting democracy in nations where there was no history of democracy. It has not always done justice to its role as a forbearer of democracy when national interests collided with democratic values. The double standard in its foreign policy has been a hurdle in its relations with its allies in Europe and Middle East. US is facing a tough time at home and abroad trying to walk a fine line of defending democracy and supporting suppressive regimes.

USA was the only country where its constitution guarded the democratic rights of all of its citizens irrespective of race, belief or colour. Its popularity as a nation of freedom loving people emerged after it pulled its enemies out of the curse of WWII by providing them aid under a marshal plan. It was expected that its economic and military muscle will be used to defend the rights of freedom and democracy all around the world. During the cold war the bipolar world was kept under a balance of power where US foreign policy was curtailed to serve its needs rather than the rights of the oppressed and the subjugated. It had generously built an alliance of nations mostly on economic aid to buffer the

influence of its socialist rival in the poor third world. These regimes were often brutal and unpopular in their own countries but that was the political price the successive US administrations were willing to accept to keep its economic and political interests intact around the globe. In the post September 11 world US is faced with a daunting task of defending the sacred rights of democracy to the very people who have been denied it so long.

It still continues to pay \$3 billion in military aid to Israel. American planes and missiles have been used against Palestinian uprisings, dealing a blow in its role as a conscience broker. The belligerent position of Bush administration to oust Saddam for alleged manufacturing and using biological and chemical weapons gives little explanations of how the Regan administration supplied the same regime with the agents to develop them. The former Bush administration did nothing to stop Saddam when he was using them against his own people. The Russian government gets away with a pat on the back for gassing its own people when a group of Chechen rebels took control of a packed theater. But Iraq is targeted for gassing the Kurds. Afghanistan was abandoned and Somalia was left to fight it out among the power hungry warlords.

The credibility of a vanguard of democracy was not only a casualty in politics abroad it has been curtailed at home too. The patriotic act and anti-terrorism laws have struck at the very civil liberties this country was based on. It has compromised its stand on political pluralism and the right of self-determination of the Chechen people in Russia. India and China have repeatedly got away with brutalizing their own minorities since US war on Terror in Afghanistan. US has not ratified the War Crimes Tribunal court for fear of its civilian leaders or soldiers who might be prosecuted for war crimes in other countries. It is appalling that the country which should uphold the rights of democracy has distanced itself from creating a neutral court of law where crimes against humanity can be tried.

It is said that truth is the first casualty of war. In this war on terror the first casualty was freedom of speech. In US the WWII was portrayed as the 'Good War' just like the ongoing War in Afghanistan has been portrayed as a 'Just War'. The Afghan civilian casualties as a direct result of US air campaign have already crossed 3500. Constructive criticism of the present administration has been attributed to aiding the enemies of democracy. The loyalty of Muslim Americans has been

frequently questioned in the aftermath of September 11. Thousands have been interned without trial. Arabs have been replaced by the soviet spies as the most favourite bad guys. In TV serials like 'The Agency' or 'F.B.Eye', an Iraqi is portrayed as a threat to peace. In recent days Indian Hindu fundamentalists have massacred thousands in Gujarat. Despite these violations of human rights which are repeatedly overlooked in India, Israel and Russia, the Muslims all over the world feel they have become the scapegoat in the present US war on terror. The media in the US do not help in disseminating unbiased and honest views.

The challenge faced by the present US administration is to justify its stand as a defender of democracy in a world where both national and economic interests collide with those of military. US reputation of a fair dealer is in shambles. To win the war on terror it has to build up its fragile relations with the disadvantaged people whose support US badly needs to keep its oil wealth. The first step towards building world peace would be to accept the will of the silent majority.

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