

Iraq WMD intelligence inquiry

Another whitewash in the offing

AN inquiry into the pre-war intelligence that led to the US and UK-led invasion of Iraq is long overdue. President Bush and Prime Minister Blair have both belatedly called for inquiries to get to the bottom of the massive failure of pre-war intelligence, but there is good reason to believe that these inquiries will be little more than whitewashes, intended to cover up the Bush and Blair administrations' missteps and mendacity.

The current position of the Bush administration is that the US went to war based on faulty intelligence and that there needs to be an inquiry into the faulty intelligence. But this position completely up-ends the well-documented reality of the situation.

The fact of the matter is that the Bush administration was determined to invade Iraq, and bullied and pressured the US intelligence agencies to cook up intelligence on Iraq's WMDs to justify such an invasion. It takes some nerve for the Bush administration to now complain that it was misled into war on the base of this faulty intelligence.

The fact that the proposed review would not be completed until 2005, well after this year's US presidential elections in November, and that it will focus on intelligence failures rather than official misuse or misstatement of the intelligence, suggests that the inquiry is little more than a political gimmick intended to protect President Bush from the well-founded accusation that he misled the US into war.

The inquiry proposed by Blair is similarly deficient in that it, too, will review only intelligence failures about Iraq's alleged WMDs, rather than the questionable use that was made of the intelligence. The focus of the inquiry is so narrow that the opposition Liberal Democrats have refused to be a part of it, and prominent anti-war critics such as former cabinet minister Robin Cook openly scoff at the notion that the inquiry has any purpose other than to exonerate Blair.

With the absurdity of the recently released Hutton report, public confidence in inquiries into government misconduct is at a low. Both Bush and Blair owe it to the public to convene real inquiries into whether they misled their nations into war. But the inquiries as they are currently envisioned could succeed only in further tarnishing the image and credibility of their already compromised administrations.

Eid postscript

Set up abattoirs to manage things better

THROB of routine life is being felt again in the city, with the festival holidays coming to an end. The city, for a change, looked like a quiet and almost deserted place for two or three days as a huge number of people went to their village homes to celebrate the Eid-ul-Azha.

The roads, lanes and by-lanes used for slaughtering animals in the absence of open spaces were cleared rather quickly by the DCC men this year around. And people also took the initiative to avoid pollution in their respective localities by washing the roads and using germicides. The situation has improved compared to what we saw in the past years. But it was still way short in meeting the specific needs of a special occasion in a city with an ever-growing population.

The problem stems from the fact that the planners of the city in a way never had any place for an occasion like Eid-ul-Azha in their scheme of things. People are left on their own to manage things on this day and what we witness is an unplanned and unhygienic use of roads and lanes for sacrificing animals. We are certainly way behind other countries in this particular area.

The solution perhaps lies in bringing the whole business within the purview of community service through setting up abattoirs in different places. Such places are needed to avoid spilling of blood and dumping of entrails and other wastes of animals in open places that violate the rules of both hygiene and decency. The religious rites and regulations can be observed fully in the abattoirs if they are designed to fulfil the needs of the occasion.

That is one idea that the DCC should consider in all seriousness. What we want to emphasise is that it will not be possible to leave things where they stand now when the population of the city will go further up and the shortage of open spaces will be felt even more acutely.

Pre-empting a nuclear Iran



M ABDUL HAFIZ

OF late, there have been spate of writings criticising or questioning the unilateralist approach that has characterised Bush's foreign policy. The intellectual elite of the world has equated the phenomenon to the return of the imperialism based on the combination of 19-century gunboat diplomacy and an application of brute military force. The US doctrine of pre-emption to justify the use of overwhelming force to bring about regime change in Iraq without UN endorsement has produced reaction that ranges from anxiety to outrage. Yet such wars are defended by many and fought in full fury as and when the interests of the US and its allies are hurt.

One of the evils of axis identified by the US -- sort of world's moral arbiter -- has already been taken care of: the preemption of a nuclear Iran is by all indication now on board. Iran's decision to open up its nuclear

facilities to IAEA inspections presents challenge to the weapon inspectors, who might find it difficult to prove that the country has a covert weapons programme.

Yet after a long calibrated silence the Iranian government announced in the third week of December last that it would allow inspectors of IAEA unfettered access to the country's nuclear facilities. Was it then an

act of tolerance" was sent to Tehran. Although the agreement with the IAEA has to be ratified by the Iranian parliament it has already the approval of President Khatami and crucially that of the supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khomeini. Far from being cowered however the prominent hard-liners who owe allegiance to Khomeini are stiffly opposed to any concessions to the West on nuclear issue par-

ilitary action against Tehran on the plea that Israel's security was endangered by Iran's alleged nuclear expertise. Israel declared Iran enemy number one in 1990s. Israeli Defence Minister Shaul Mofaz issued public warning in late December that his country was thinking in terms of launching an attack to destroy Iran's nuclear capability. Meir Daggan, Israel's head of

Iraq and Iran are signatories to the NPT which allows member-countries to develop nuclear power for peaceful purpose.

Also otherwise, according to some commentators Iran has a right to develop its own nuclear deterrent especially in view of the deteriorating security situation in the region. Iran has already developed Shahab-3 nuclear-capable missile with the ability of hitting target within

thoroughly ravaged by eight years of Iran-Iraq war. Moscow stepped into the picture as it had begun to share similar concern with Tehran about the dramatic expansion of American influence in their backyard.

With regard to present stand off over Iran's nukes, notwithstanding the US' multi-pronged moves against Iran the latter may be the beneficiary of a divided house. The Bush administration pressuring 35-nation IAEA board calling for most severe action against Iran for continuing with its nuclear programme may finally get the support of only four nation in current UNSC in its bid to impose international sanction on Iran. None of the other permanent members including Britain would like to support hard-line stance taken by Bush administration. The EU which has strong economic ties with Iran has answered Tehran that if it complies with IAEA guideline, Iran would be given access to modern nuclear technology and supplies from countries such as France, Germany and UK. Given the equation emerging from fast changing nuclear politics of Iran the planned nuclear monopoly for Israel may still be a distant dream.

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

PERSPECTIVES

Bushehr plant is an old Iranian dream and formed part of Iran of imperial era when it set its sight to become the policeman of the Gulf: 85 per cent of Bushehr plant had been completed before the Islamic revolution of Iran in 1979. It was thoroughly ravaged by eight years of Iran-Iraq war. Moscow stepped into the picture as it had begun to share similar concern with Tehran about the dramatic expansion of American influence in their backyard.

after thought of Gadaffi's capitulation? However, at Khatami's instance, a non-proliferation treaty protocol had been promptly signed by Ali Akbar Salehi, Iranian representative to the IAEA at its HQ in Vienna and was hailed as significant breakthrough. The agreement required Iran to submit intrusive and unannounced inspections of the nuclear complexes and research facilities.

In November, the IAEA had approved a resolution condemning Iran for engaging in secret nuclear activities. According to IAEA chief El Baradei, strong message which said that "future breaches will

ticularly in the light of the behaviour of IAEA inspectors in neighbouring Iraq where they used inspections as a pretext to espionage on behalf of the United States. It is no secret that the influential neo-conservatives in Washington would like to see nothing better than the demise of Iran's Islamic revolution.

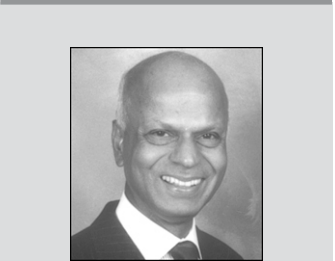
In the meantime in post 9/11 milieu Iran's predicaments are indeed extraordinary. In the wake Gulf War II the US virtually surrounded Iran. American troops were stationed virtually in all the neighbouring countries. Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon has been demanding

external intelligence told the parliamentarians in November last that Iran's nuclear programme posed the biggest threat to Israel since its creation in 1948. There is speculation that once the Bushehr reactor is ready to be loaded with nuclear fuel in the middle of 2004 the US may tacitly give its ally Israel the go-ahead to attack Iran. Obviously, such an attack would irreparably weaken Iran and help preserve Israel's nuclear monopoly in West Asian region. With American approval, it may be recalled, Israel had targeted Iraq's main nuclear facility at Osirak in the early 1980s. Nevertheless, both

a range of 1350 km, bringing both West and central Asia in its ambit. Iran's main nuclear processing centre at Bushehr is being completed by Russia and no amount of arm-twisting by Bush administration on Russian government could dissuade it from its firm commitment now formalised bilaterally under a \$800 deal to complete the reactor.

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World Economic Forum: Does it serve any useful purpose?



CHAKLADER MAHBOOB-UL ALAM
writes from Madrid

DAVOS is a small German-speaking mountain town, situated, more than 1500m. above the sea level, in the eastern part of Switzerland. It has long been considered as one of the world's finest ski resorts. But its recent reputation is due not so much to its winter sports facilities, nor to its bracing air (particularly good for the treatment of tuberculosis) but to its being the venue for the annual meetings of an institution called the World Economic Forum (the brain child of a clever impresario called Klaus Schwab). The WEF is considered as the world's biggest think tank by its supporters and as the largest gabfest by its detractors. Here, where Thomas Mann wrote The Magic Mountain, the rich (the barons of capitalism), the powerful (the politicians) and the agents of global capitalism (the World Bank, The International Monetary Fund, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and the World Trade Organisation) have been meeting regularly since 1971 to search for multilateral solutions to emerging world problems". Every year, they discuss the current issues and come up with a motto,-- a succinct message which the forum organisers hope will influence world opinion and government agendas all over the world.

This year's World Economic Forum meeting has just come to an end with the noticeable ab-

sence of significant anti-globalisation demonstrators. More than two thousand businessmen, politicians, intellectuals and the like met for five days to address world issues. This year, although the official theme was "partnering for security and prosperity", the emphasis was on the security concerns of the United States.

According to some analysts, many participants felt that the Forum was no longer an impartial

This year, John Ashcroft, the US attorney general (the man who enforces the US Patriot Act with the zeal of a fundamentalist fanatic and who defends the incarceration of hundreds of Muslim men and boys in Guantanamo and on the mainland of the US without access to due process of law) came to give lessons on human rights. And of course, Vice President Dick Cheney (the real brains behind the so-called Bush doctrine of pre-emptive wars and a firm

seek a permission slip (presumably he was referring to the United Nations) to defend the security of our country." What does this mean in plain English? Well, as translated in plain English by Maureen Dowd of the New York Times, it means, "Hey, we don't need no stinking piece of paper to bring it on in other countries. If it feels good, we'll do it, and we'll decide later why we did it. You lookin' at me?"

But behind these acts of bravado, there was an uncomfort-

in the words of Andrew Williams, a British Banker, who attended the meeting. Asked by Alan Cowell of The International Herald Tribune to comment on the American position in the world, he said, "Last year they were bidding for moral authority. This year, I don't think the United States comes across with any sense of moral authority."

On the economic front, there was a grudging acknowledgement by most of the participants that globalisation in its current

any case, were thought to be unachievable from the very beginning, the sad fact today is that more than 1100 million people try somehow to survive on one dollar a day. There are approximately 840 million in this world who suffer from starvation on a regular basis and more than 24000 people die of hunger every day. There is nothing to indicate that this trend will be reversed in the near future. On the contrary, the future prospects look even gloomier. The participants were at a loss in their search for alternative strategies to solve mankind's major problems.

After more than thirty years of existence, the WEF has unfortunately become identified with heartless capitalism without any social or ethical conscience. Although from time to time pep talks have been given on subjects like "Social Inequalities", "The Backlash Against Globalisation", "Social Justice", etc., judging by the results of the current economic order, one can not but conclude that the system has failed to deliver on its promises of a better world. So, does the WEF serve any useful purpose?

It is good to have as many venues as possible for formal and informal debates and discussions. In this respect, the WEF in Davos certainly serves a useful purpose. However, if year after year, its organisers allow the Forum to be hijacked by the United States government agenda and does not take a genuine interest in resolving the problems of the humanity, then, I am afraid, it will continue to be perceived as a rich man's club without any democratic legitimacy where important decisions affecting the lot of billions of people are taken in back room deals.

LETTER FROM EUROPE

After more than thirty years of existence, the WEF has unfortunately become identified with heartless capitalism without any social or ethical conscience. Although from time to time pep talks have been given on subjects like "Social Inequalities", "The Backlash Against Globalisation", "Social Justice", etc., judging by the results of the current economic order, one can not but conclude that the system has failed to deliver on its promises of a better world.

venue and that it had been hijacked by the United States government. Last year, Colin Powell, the US secretary of state came to sell the US plan to invade Iraq unilaterally on the excuse that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction capable of striking targets in the West at short notice. (David Kay, the chief American inspector, appointed by the Bush administration has just resigned after making a clear statement that Saddam Hussein got rid of his unconventional weapons long before the Iraq invasion. At the same time he also suggested that an independent commission might be needed "to fully explore the pre-war errors". Now both President Bush and Prime Minister Blair have agreed to set up independent commissions for this purpose. Whether these commissions will investigate the errors and responsibilities in an impartial manner remains yet to be seen.)

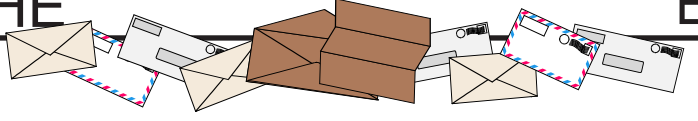
believer in Bush's theory of the US being "a nation with a mission") lectured on the virtues of introducing democracy, freedom and liberty in the Middle East and beyond. (One wonders what he really means by that word "beyond"? Does his vision include not only Iraq and Afghanistan but also countries like Iran, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Malaysia and Indonesia?)

Despite the somewhat conciliatory tone of Ashcroft and Cheney, there was a consensus of opinion among the participants that the post-World War II international order based on multilateral dialogue, respect for law, territorial sovereignty and the United Nations had been seriously damaged, that the US with its exclusive hold on military and political power had become an international bully, i.e., a law unto itself. In this context one can not ignore Bush's recent assertion in the state of the union speech, "America will never

able and sad realisation on the part of the US that "while there is no regime in the world the United States can't destroy on its own, there is also none that it can rebuild on its own." This was the reason why this year, Cheney came to Davos. He asked the United Nations and the Europeans to forget the unpleasantness of last year (when the US did not want to listen to anyone) and help the US to pacify and rebuild Iraq. Of course, one may well ask, if Dick Cheney was seeking help from the United Nations, then instead of travelling so far to Davos, why did he not just go to the United Nations in New York and submit American proposals there for democratic debate and discussion? After all, the United Nations enjoys much more international recognition and legitimacy than a private organisation like the World Economic Forum. The role played by the Bush administration in Davos, in my opinion, can be best summarised

form had failed to address the most important economic issues of the world such as poverty, hunger and inequality and that despite phenomenal economic growth during the last thirty years or so globalisation had in fact aggravated the already precarious situation in many parts of the world. As Kofi Annan, the secretary general of the United Nations, as the voice of the universal human conscience pointed out in his keynote speech at the Forum that the most privileged nations of the world (meaning the North) have spent thousands of millions of dollars in their fight against terrorism but have not done much to resolve the very basic problems of the humanity like poverty, hunger or even access to safe drinking water, which, (in my opinion), are the root causes of terrorism. Leaving aside the Declaration of Millennium Objectives ratified in 2002 by 189 countries which, in

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR



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Political pollution!

The government is rightly concerned with awareness programmes on environmental pollution. But the political masters never talk about political pollution, and its adverse long-term effects on society, and how to tackle it, starting right from the top downwards and not the other way round.

Mud-slinging does not come under development projects. It does not improve the situation, or cleanses the atmosphere. The sense fog we are experiencing in the heavens above (weather) during these early February days are being reflected in the notorious fogginess in our political culture. We are suffering from lack of political sunshine (and warmth) in these days of cold wars.

New negative modalities are being introduced in the politico-religious fields, with the sudden upsurge in the anti-Ahmadiyya

movement, never seen before in this part of the world since the British days. The presence of hidden foreign hands cannot be discounted when the huge Asian market is up for grabs by the world powers. There is another negative factor in our politics. According to a news item, 45 per cent of the MPs are business persons, without a background or experience in politics. This creates pockets of vested interests. The system losses are huge, based on cumulative effect, but the political pundits concerned are keeping rather mum on the adverse implications.

Legitimate political activity was on hibernation for many years since independence in 1971; and now it looks like that there is a need for a second phase of resting period for the super-active politicians under training (tutorial). If trainees become leaders, then the future of the nation is not bright.

The philosophical approach to create a suitable base is to have a clear role of reward and punishment in the society. Defaulters cannot sit over policies and judgement. The established institutions have to be revived for proper processing of public grievances. The role of the bureaucracy (civil service) is warped due to political distortions; and there are allegations in the press about a parallel secretariat in operation these days. The public services and institutions are already overloaded, with low entrenched inefficiency. The reforms have to start at the roots and trunks, and not at the branches and leaves (thus the details would automatically sort out in the right mode). Ad hocism in politics is a bane for emerging societies. What we need is perhaps a parallel political stream.

Alif Zabr
Dhaka

An emblem of liberation

The sculpture 'Swadhinata Sangram' is the absolute embodiment of the consciousness and struggle of Bangalees. Eminent sculptor Shamim Sikder erected this grand and pompous sculpture.

It is situated on the turn of the Fuller Road, i.e. between Jagannath Hall and SM Hall. Former prime minister Sheikh Hasina inaugurated the sculpture on 10th March, 1999.

Shamim Sikder built the first, and one of the largest, sculpture gardens in the country. The artisan has also created one hundred and three small sculptures around the altar of liberation memorial sculpture. Images of prominent persons and different scenes of Bangalee culture have been included in the garden.

Four phases of our history

1952, '69, '71 and '75 have been represented in Sadhinata Sangram. The phases of history have reduced the work into a compound sculpture. In fact, every phase is a distinct sculpture. The usage of light, music and water makes the work very attractive and impressive to the visitors. A spring of water, melodious tune of music and mesmerising light amid the sculpture create a fine artistic environment.

Many visitors from remote areas come to enjoy the beauty of the sculpture and its surroundings. It is really a pleasant sight.

Palash Podder
Dept of Sociology, DU

Foreign physicians needed

It is a very good decision that the Ministry of Health has given permission to foreign physicians for private practice in our coun-

try. I think we can save our valuable foreign exchange as we do not have to go abroad for medical treatment. Ninety per cent of our physicians who work as government servants are attached to medical college hospitals and district level hospitals. They have to take classes at the medical college and have to attend patients. They have to experiment on different subjects and also serve in private clinics as part time practitioners. In these cases they find it very difficult to develop proper treatment standards.

Thus we are deprived of good and proper medical services. That explains why hundreds of people go abroad for better medical treatment. All of them are not rich people. Middle class people are also going abroad for proper and better medicare. So we need good physicians from foreign countries to fill up the gap.

Abu Gursel Siddiqui
Chittagong

"State of the Union" address

Whether we like or dislike the subject, the annual event and its ultimate effect has been for some time in the past a major deciding factor to shape the fate of people all over the world. I was watching this year's live CNN coverage of George W Bush's address on 21st January, 2004, delivered to the joint sessions of both the Houses of the Congress at Capitol Hill. Showing great regard for democracy, freedom, human rights and all those lofty ideals /values, which have so long been the contents of such deliberations, was the norm in the past, but this latest one apparently was full of arrogance of power and unfair justification of the damage caused to all of those values for which the US stood up in the past.

The reactions inside the House from the Senators/Congressmen and more so the expressions of the Democrats, including their leaders in the Houses, and Ted Kennedy in particular to CNN were total rejection of the president's view points. It was perhaps a unique demonstration of such a great occasion tuned in to a clear-cut partisan show that was probably never seen before. No one can deny that the whole thing was tailored to be Bush's next election campaign rhetoric. No matter how hard Mr. Bush, and his war-mongering aides, may try to plunge the world to further insanity and disorder, the American people ought to give the right answers in the next polls in order to save the world from further disasters.

Zahedur Rahman
A globe trotter
Gulshan, Dhaka