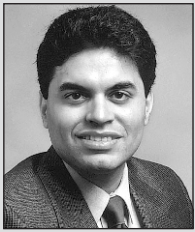


In Iraq, it's time for some smarts



FAREED ZAKARIA
writes from Washington

AS the war in Iraq was coming to a close, many people-- from Tony Blair to Joseph Biden (and even this writer)-- urged Washington to give the United Nations a central role in postwar politics. This had been a well-worked formula for at least a decade: in Kosovo, East Timor and most recently in Afghanistan, where it produced a legitimate government and a constitutional process with remarkably little conflict. But the Bush administration was adamantly opposed -- even though sidelining the UN would mean fewer troops and less money from other countries. "We fought the war," administration officials explained to me at the time, "and besides, the UN is not competent to handle a complex undertaking like Iraq." Six months later, with Washington facing a political train wreck in Iraq, whom did it call? The United Nations.

The lesson here is not that the United Nations is always right. It isn't. The lesson is that America needs to exercise power shrewdly, using those instruments that help achieve its goals -- UN, NATO, World Bank, Rotary Club, whatever. As politics in Iraq get more complicated -- and they're going to get a lot more complicated -- Washington will have to be far more sophisticated than it has been.

It was obvious that a nakedly American occupation was going to make Iraqis resent the United States. The Pentagon's ideologues couldn't see this, but Ayatollah Ali Sistani did. From the start he has refused to meet with any American, including Paul Bremer. But he met with the UN's senior official, Sergio Vieira de Mello. When Washington argued that elections couldn't be held by this June, Sistani wouldn't

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buy it. But when Kofi Annan sent his envoy, Lakhdar Brahimi, Sistani spent two hours with him and consented to a delay.

In an interview with Der Spiegel last Saturday, Sistani voiced opposition to the invasion and occupation, and accused the United States of delaying the elections. His strongest criticisms, however, were about the sidelining of the UN, saying, "We had demanded from the beginning that the UN play a primary role in the political process ... The UN was not even mentioned in the agreement reached between the occupying power and the Interim Governing Council on November 15th of last year. Now Annan has responded to our request, which we consider a great victory."

Sistani insisted that going forward, the Security Council should pass a resolution specifying the date of the elections and tightly limiting the powers of the government that will rule Iraq from June 30 until the elections. In other words, the only authority Sistani accepts outside of the Iraqi people is the United Nations. (He also showered praise on Brahimi.)

Sistani is a shrewd man. He is not making this case out of a deep love of the UN, but because he realises that he needs to show his distance from the United States. Yet he doesn't want to provoke a clash with the US. He seems to be signaling that if Washington worked through the UN, it would be easier for him to bless the results. In the rest of the Spiegel interview, he was careful to say that he did not want an Islamic state for Iraq and that religious minorities should be protected by law. "Shiite clerics (in Iraq) subscribe to the view that religious scholars should neither be involved with political questions nor assume government offices," he said -- and

in one pivotal sentence totally repudiated the Iranian model of government.

That's why Paul Bremer's statement last week -- that he would veto anything in the interim law that established Islam as the source for the country's constitution -- backfired. There was little danger of this happening, as Sistani's comments make clear, and it galvanised Iraqis, with almost all major religious groupings denouncing Bremer for interference. Apparently Bremer was pressured to do this by some senators, who don't seem to understand that a soft touch would work better than a sledgehammer.

Come July, America will have much less influence over Iraq's political development than it had once hoped. It will have troops on the ground and provide massive economic assistance to the Iraqi government. But such power does not always translate into influence. Ask anyone who worked in the American Embassy in South Viet-

nam. You need political and diplomatic skill.

The next American ambassador to Baghdad will run the largest embassy in the world. But he must keep the Shiites happy and yet encourage the rise of a Sunni leadership that can stand up to the Shiites. He must get the Kurds to give up some of the independence they've enjoyed for 12 years now.

He must work through the Security Council to put pressure on the Iraqis if and when needed. He must use American aid to influence economic and political reforms. And he must ensure that none of this is branded imperialism. Hmm, I wonder if the UN could spare someone.

Fareed Zakaria is Editor of Newsweek International.

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Why the Democrats hate President Bush

DR. FAKHRUDDIN AHMED writes from Princeton

FIRST and foremost, the Democrats have not forgiven President Bush for "stealing" the 2000 Presidential election. The Dems were ready to ignore the fact that their candidate Al Gore received over 600,000 more votes nationwide than Mr. Bush and was still not elected; what they cannot forgive is Mr. Bush's appeal to the rightwing US Supreme Court to stop the Florida recount, and the US Supreme Court's decision to hear a case that should have been decided by the Florida Supreme Court, which had ordered the recount. As is common knowledge now, in a shameful display of partisan judicial activism, five Republican Presidents-appointed judges of the US Supreme Court stopped the recount and handed Mr. Bush the Presidency. In the eyes of many Democrats Mr. Bush is an illegitimate President.

For the sake of the country Mr. Gore and the Democrats bit the bullet and were willing to put up with Mr. Bush as long as he demonstrated humility and acknowledged the dubious nature of his election. To his credit, Mr. Bush did remain humble and modest for the first nine months of his Presidency. He busied himself with enacting tax cuts and the ethics of stem cell research. September 11 changed everything. The nation, including the Democrats, rallied around the President. In the months following 9/11, with the country solidly behind him, Mr. Bush provided much needed effective leadership. Everyone, including the Democrats, refrained from criticising the President.

As the November 2002 midterm congressional, senatorial and gubernatorial elections approached, Mr. Bush abused his immense popularity by painting the Democrats as soft on national security. Here were the Democrats supporting the President because he was leading the nation against its fight against terrorism, and there was Mr. Bush questioning the patriotism of those Democrats! The Democrats were furious! Specifically, it was the Democrats who had come up with the idea of the Department of Homeland Security; the Republicans initially opposed it because of the cost. During the congressional debate on the bill, the Democrats fought to give the employees of the new department the right to unionise. Mr. Bush seized upon the opportunity to accuse the Democrats of being against the Department of Homeland Security, although it was the Democrats who had come up with the idea in the first place! During the 2002 Senatorial election campaign in the state of Georgia, the Republicans ran ads with pictures of Saddam Hussein and Osama Bin Laden next to the incumbent Democratic Senator Max Cleland, purporting to allude that Senator Cleland had things in common with the two criminals. Democrats were

incensed because Senator Max Cleland is a genuine war hero who lost both his legs fighting for his country in Vietnam, whereas Mr. Bush pulled all the strings to avoid service in Vietnam, opting instead for the safety of Texas National Guard, that too by leapfrogging over 500 candidates who were ahead of him! Thanks to the Republican smear tactics, Senator Cleland lost.

With so many people out of work and the economy tanking before the November 2002 elections, the writer asked his Congressman why the Democrats were not making the economy the main election issue. "The President defines the national agenda," he answered. It was only partially true, even then. In truth, the Democrats were afraid to attack the popular President -- except in Louisiana. Since none of the Senatorial candidates in the state of

that the war should be the last resort. With the war resolution under his belt, the President completely ignored the caveats for the Democratic support. He bypassed and insulted the United Nations, ridiculed the traditional allies such as France and Germany for raising legitimate doubts about Iraq's WMDs which everyone now knows did not exist, and went to the neocon-triggered war as the first resort, with only the UK by its side. The Democrats fumed.

With the apparent quick victory over the toothless Iraqi army, President Bush could not suppress his glee. On May 1 of last year, the President donned a pilot's uniform and stage-managed his controversial landing on an aircraft carrier off the coast of California to declare major hostilities over in Iraq. Although the aircraft carrier was

crates realised that Mr. Bush is not the real package; he is really packaged!

By a long shot the mission was not accomplished in Iraq; it was only beginning. The President had remained heedless to the warning of the well-wishers that winning the war would be easy, but winning the peace would not. With the dribs and drabs of mounting casualties in Iraq, Americans began taking a closer look at how America got into this mess. What they found was presidential deceit, if not outright lies. The nation was alarmed when weapons inspector Dr. David Kay declared last month that there are no WMDs in Iraq, and that none existed before the American attack. Governor Howard Dean was the first politician to exploit the Democrats' anger at the President. While the other Democratic Presidential candidates hesitated, Dean began a frontal attack on the President and his policies, which catapulted him to the top. Dean's support was soft. He too had not served in Vietnam, and the Democrats realised that he would not be able to defeat Bush one on one. Dean's fortunes fizzled out after January's Iowa caucus forcing him to quit last week. When General Wesley Clark entered the race too late, he instantly, albeit temporarily, became the front-runner because of his military credentials. But Clark was no politician, made blunders and eventually ran out of money and dropped out. Senator John Kerry adopted Dean's anti-Bush platform, and because he is a war hero, immediately became the front-runner, apparently for keeps.

In his February 7 interview with Tim Russert on "Meet the Press" President Bush asserted that he would not lose the presidential election in November 2004. Of course Karl Rove and the Republican juggernaut will do everything in their power to make that prediction come to fruition. What one worries about is where America's interest ends and George Bush's personal interest begins. What happens when the two interests collide? For example, this is what Thomas Friedman, *The New York Times'* pro-Israeli op-ed columnist wrote on February 4 in his column: "Sharon has the Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat under house arrest in his office in Ramallah, and he's had George Bush under house arrest in the Oval Office. Sharon has Arafat surrounded by tanks, and Bush surrounded by Jewish and Christian pro-Israeli lobbyists, by a Vice President, Dick Cheney, who is ready to do whatever Sharon dictates, and by political handlers telling the president not to put any pressure on Israel in an election year -- all conspiring to make sure Bush does nothing."

very close to the coast, the President landed from the opposite side so that the camera gave the impression the episode had taken place somewhere in the middle of the ocean! It later transpired that the White House had supplied the sign "Mission Accomplished" that formed the backdrop for the President's speech! The Democrats were furious. When the nation called, Senators like 2000 Democratic Presidential candidate Al Gore and the 2004 Democratic frontrunner John Kerry put their lives on the line for their country, and both fought heroically in Vietnam. Mr. Bush on the other hand joined the National Guard, which is where rich kids with political clout escaped to, to avoid being physically harmed in Vietnam. And here was Mr. Bush purporting to be an out and out patriot and landing on an aircraft carrier to proclaim victory in Iraq. That is why the rallying cry for the Democratic Presidential front-runner John Kerry is, "some of us really know something about aircraft carrier landings!" Stage management of the President continued through his surprise Thanksgiving Day visit to Baghdad last November when it was revealed that the huge turkey with which he entered the mess hall and which he supposedly was going to serve the soldiers was fake and was supplied by his cronies at Halliburton! Demo-

Health practitioners: Above the law?

BICHOLITO

THE quality of health care services in Bangladesh continues to be of great concern and confidence in it is shaky at best. For minor ailments, people will hazard visiting a doctor; for anything significant, the anxiety levels can rise rather rapidly as one contemplates a consultation. The fact is that service quality remains substantially below par relative to even regional standards while patients continue to pay inordinate sums of money for mistreatment, maltreatment, or no treatment at all. The list of deplorable services provided by this sector is rather long -- and that is not to suggest that other sectors are any better. But my focus here is on health services.

From the media we learn of the lone cancer hospital with no drugs or therapy, we learn of diarrhoeal deaths in the districts while stool culture reports fail to reach the health complexes, we note how patients are crammed into the verandahs or storerooms like sardines, we see how stray dogs share hospital premises with patients as they hang around the food trolleys (perhaps for a sneak lick), we see pictures of the blood bank at DMCH and shudder, we read reports of at least 10-15 cases of wrong treatment every month and that the doctors responsible go unpunished: that claim made by the Bangladesh Medical and Dental Council, and we remember how Hosne Ara lay for three days at DMCH with a sharp object lodged in her right eye waiting for a doctor to remove it.

From casual conversations with the unfortunate, we further learn of the amputation of the wrong limb, the administration of drug doses that have driven patients to or near death, the prescription of wrong drugs to patients, the needless cross-referencing of patients to "friends" in the profession, the piling of diagnostic tests to be conducted at "specified" diagnostic centers, the nursing of patients in private clinics not by trained personnel but by janitorial staff who have no business handling patients, the delays in admitting patients in serious coronary conditions leading to their expiry, and of doctors coming late to assist with a delivery that was fatal because of bleeding during the long interlude.

These are but a few examples of what goes on in the zone of disaster, otherwise known as health care centers. The unbearable suffering of the patients must also be endured in near equal measure by another group: their families and near and dear ones. They are also made to pay dearly -- physically, emotionally, and of course financially until they are at their wit's end.

When one person goes down with a health problem, the suffering begins for many in this utterly mis-

managed sector. And because of inadequate and deficient service provision by the so-called health care practitioners, it is not difficult to understand the rage one feels at their insincerity and incompetence. That rage is accompanied by a sense of helplessness that there is very little recourse when negligence or serious errors committed by the service providers end up as life-threatening, life-debilitating or life-ending.

Yet, seemingly, you cannot penalise these health care providers. Not yet!

According to the reports of a human rights organisation, "Nearly 90 percent of the complaints go unheeded because in most cases the victims are unable to provide required evidence against the doctors." And now, according to a report in a local daily, a bill that was

Bank study), slashing and gashing patients wherever and whenever they please without being held accountable, overdosing them with whatever brand they were "persuaded" to administer by the drug companies, sending them to their "partner" diagnostic centers and "friends" in the profession, behaving as rudely as ever for making them work, and so on. And for these practices they do not have to account for or be subject to penalties!

A second consequence is that of sending the wrong message to other constituencies and lobbies. We already see some semblance of this, especially how teachers, transport workers, and fourth class employees have seemingly become untouchable and who are so powerful that the government is out to placate their slightest whims -- right

It would, however, be irresponsible not to acknowledge that there are good providers in the system who care, work hard, and try their very best to save lives. But it is debatable whether that can be said for the large majority of health care providers, both public and private, who seem to be solely inclined to make windfall gains instead of following the Hippocratic Oath.

passed by the cabinet to punish private clinics and their healthcare personnel for negligence leading to death, serious and sustained mental suffering, or loss of limb, has been withdrawn. The proposed punishment included cancellation of practitioners' licence, 10 years rigorous imprisonment, and/or a penalty of Tk. 10 lakhs. Not surprisingly, there was a hue and cry from the practitioner community, with serious reservations against punitive measures.

The fact is punitive measures are essential to establish accountability and to exert some form of control over medical practitioners who cause unbearable suffering to their clientele. These measures must be vigorously enforced under the prevailing circumstances in Bangladesh to bring about behavioral changes among the practitioners. Otherwise, the pitiable and sordid plight of the patients will continue. Unfortunately, the health care providers seem reluctant to change their ways as they have sought representation of powerful lobbies with strong enough influence to have the bill withdrawn, to be watered down substantially.

What are some of the consequences of not having this timely bill implemented immediately? Primarily, a section of the care providers will continue on their merry way, coming late to work or not at all (74% do not show up according to a World

or wrong. Soon, others will create their own powerful lobbies to make accountability an obsolete word. Thereafter, we will subject to the laws of the jungle. It is not as if we are too far from it anyway, given the daily dose of crime, corruption, and audacious behaviour across the land that we confront and, sadly, endure each day.

A third consequence is economic: Exonerating health care practitioners from being penalised or watering down these penalties would drive more patients who can afford it to seek treatment alternatives in other countries. I know of someone who recently had a mild heart attack. The individual flew immediately to a neighbouring country for a check up and advice. Apparently, he has been advised to return for a follow-up and he intends to do so when it is time. On a grand scale, if patients begin to flock out, en masse, the burden on the nation's foreign exchange resources is yet to be estimated.

It may be mentioned that customers seeking health care abroad have been known to suffer collateral miseries associated with travel, meals, accommodation, and related needs. For any major mishap necessitating a longer stay than originally planned, these inconveniences could easily be magnified several-fold. That would mean the use of more money "there" instead of "here", impoverishing the nation

further in its ability to combat problems in other sectors. Clearly, if health care providers could be "goaded", under threat of penalties, to deliver what they are supposed to deliver in any case, this outflow of resources could not only be stopped, it may even be possible to reverse it. It is difficult to surmise why health care providers fail to understand this point and work collectively to upgrade the entire sector and bring back people's trust and confidence in them. It is time they engage in some introspection about the prevailing conditions and their Hippocratic Oath. It is also time for people to know how one might seek redress for practitioners' failures.

When healthcare providers make health conditions unbearable for their own mistakes, they must be subjected to laws that are supposed to protect the well-being of the citizenry. Being held accountable and being subjected to the laws of the nation is even more important in their case because when dealing with human lives, incompetence is a crime, negligence is a crime, charging exorbitant sums for something patients cannot evaluate is a crime, recommending unnecessary procedures and tests is a crime, and partnering with "friends" in the profession to boost revenues is a crime. All of this and more must be reluctantly borne by mute patients and those who care for them, day in day out, because they have few alternatives and no recourse.

It would, however, be irresponsible not to acknowledge that there are good providers in the system who care, work hard, and try their very best to save lives. But it is debatable whether that can be said for the large majority of health care providers, both public and private, who seem to be solely inclined to make windfall gains instead of following the Hippocratic Oath.

The withdrawal of the bill after being passed by the cabinet is a singularly thoughtless act that demands an explanation. There must also be a national debate on this issue once the watered down bill is re-introduced because giving health care providers an easy way out is certainly not the answer. It is time for the leadership to establish accountability in this sector. That means difficult choices must be made; but that is what leadership is about. If the people of the land feel they are represented by an ineffective leadership -- emasculated by the various lobbies or by the powers that be -- what can they (the people) expect of such leadership? And if this leadership favours the powerful minority over the weak majority, the sense of injustice can be debilitating for the nation as the powerful will continue to exploit the weak. That, to the citizens, is unacceptable!

Merit crisis in administration

An introspection

KAZI ALAUDDIN AHMED

RELATED and yet the much expected express realisation was, at long last, placed on the table by the Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia. It is about the present almost chronic lack of merited people in the administration and in all other areas of our social life. In fact, she said that a terrible dearth of merit has eclipsed our entire national life setting off deep crisis all around and unfortunately public administration has also not been an exception to the rule. This was the summarised observation she made during her address at the Bangladesh Public Administration Training Centre (BPATC). Savar while inaugurating the newly built international training complex and commencement ceremony of the 32nd Foundation Training Course.

Nevertheless, the observation of the Prime Minister as the Head of the Administration, would not absolve her or any one else in her place, of the vicarious responsibility for the crisis in the administration. As has been the pitiable tradition in our country the bureaucracy, often subject to criticism by the politicians having no idea about a better alternative, is hardly allowed to perform their duties and responsibilities in accordance with the set rules of business. Those very few thorough-bred civil servants displaying guts to go by the rules and procedures often come in conflict with the political party in power and eventually disgraced. At such moments the lesser ones come into the limelight playing second fiddle to the wary political masters in the administration and feigning themselves as the 'loyalists' take the positions of their humiliated bosses. The latter are either made OSDs or are forced into premature retirement or taking long leave to be away from the circus.

Again there are the ones who, upon their attaining the age of superannuation or retirement hang on to the contractual employment. There are instances of such people getting extension two to four times. In consequence, the officials who are aspirants for the slots occupied by the contractual ones, are demoralised and frustrated. Those who merit promotion would most naturally and justifiably grudge such unwholesome dispensation.

If the administration is bereft of skill and is inefficient and unworthy it creates various types of impediments to good governance and to the development of the country. It has been indeed a perpetual malady with the

national administrative machinery. This can be attributed to two broad reasons, namely, the ever declining quality of the top ranking civil servants and the reckless and forced politicising of the whole administrative structure. None seems to have been able to attach any importance to the far reaching damage, due to such imposition, done to the administrative machinery. Such intriguing intervention extending to frequent changes of the incumbents aimed at joining effective support from the 'liked ones' has been proved to be a suicidal gamble on the part of the party in power.

Individual's 'likes and dislikes', irrespective of the operational require-

able to offer tangible solutions with objective analysis. They would also pass on the bucks to the higher authority taking advantage of the centralisation of power and refrain from taking decision themselves. Another major stigma has been that the people in the administrative machinery, have, in most of the cases, enough responsibility but with no authority. And even if they had the authority (they do have in some cases) how many of them would exercise the authority is a matter to ponder upon.

Only very recently we were told by the news media that the present government was seriously thinking of maximum decentralisation in admin-

shall have huge reservation about the majority. The situation shall appear all the more emaciated due to free political patronage for gaining unqualified loyalty of those favoured ones though not deserving. Such forced loyalty and unsavoury allegiance inevitably blindfold these beneficiaries to the good bureaucratic practices, the set norms of rules and regulations and ultimately trap them in compelling situations dispensing undue favours to their 'highly placed benefactors and/or against their noble and formidable names, to the 'party zealots, musclemen fondly called 'party cadre'!

Actually the crisis of merit the Hon'ble Prime Minister was taking about at BPATC, Savar, owed its origin to the level of real excellence of the basic educational background of the individuals donning BCS cadre and of those non-cadre ones and promotes from lower ranks. And when we look at the educational background of the average BCS officers routed through the Public Service Commission we are scarcely impressed. We are even entrapped by certain intriguing thoughts about the much publicised scandals around the conduct of BCS examination in the past couple of years, adoption of unfair means, etc.

The Prime Minister was very right when she said that there was no alternative to training. She exhorted the trainers in BPATC to impart such training to the batch of BCS officers as would enable them to do full justice to their placement in important administrative positions and display real merit of performance. It is indeed not too much of an expectation from the head of the government. But, in the context of the basic weaknesses in the whole administrative system, vis-a-vis the inconsequential political exploitation of bureaucracy, the fulfilment of the expectation shall only be a reality as and when the insidious loopholes are honestly removed beforehand. Else, it shall continue as a cry in the wilderness betraying ever the credibility of the ones harbouring such expectation keeping their eyes closed to the actual causes of the present 'merit crisis'.

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