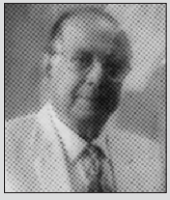


# 'Say you! Is this the way of the mighty?'



FARUQ CHOUDHURY

(This piece is a sequel to an article the author wrote, under the same heading, a year ago today)

Mr. Bush! A year ago, when you had just launched your aggression against Iraq, I addressed an open letter to you, published by "The Daily Star" on March 24, 2003. The letter, understandably, would have escaped your attention, but the views expressed therein, and those of many other ordinary citizens of this country, might have caught the attention of the relevant quarters of your government in this country, for whatever those were considered worth.

Mr. Bush! painful though it is to recall, so much of what is now happening in Iraq is what one had foreseen, and this prompts me to address yet another letter to you under the same title a year to the day of the previous one. What encourages me furthermore in this endeavour is the fact that my protest, joining as it has, with those of millions of others all over the world, including your compatriots, has now turned into a deafening roar that must now be reverberating in your own backyard. Even CNN reported that as many as 250 protest meetings were held in your country on the first anniversary of your Iraq invasion. One of the points made in that letter was that a cruel dictator though Saddam was, his acceptability as the Head of State, according to the established

civilized norms, lay on the people of Iraq and not on you. You ordered Saddam out of his own country, bag and baggage. Predictably he did not obey your orders.

As expected, Saddam lost his little battle with you, but do you, Mr. President, honestly think, that you have won the war? Incidentally, you will have noted that Saddam, till he was apprehended, had to move in his country as a fugitive, but did not oblige you by leaving it. He will now be tried, hopefully fairly, and who knows how many cats will come out of his bag that he has carried for three and half decades, at times, albeit with US support. I shed no crocodiles tears for Saddam, Mr. President, but the fact that the people of Iraq are angry at your presence in that country must be sadly apparent to you by the body bags and coffins that are flown back from Iraq regularly and by the ever lengthening queue of your wounded and disabled soldiers taking their flights back home.

In my letter to you a year ago I said, "Mr. Bush! no one knows, not even you, when your aggression will come to an end. But from past experience one can say that as the intensity of your aggression subsides, fresh crises will emerge. The fear is that Iraq may turn out to be another Vietnam or yet another Palestine." I had indeed warned in my letter that "your soldiers may also have to pay the price for your aggression. Many are likely to return home in coffins. But will they not be, by the objective yardstick of history, viewed as simple aggressors, acting under orders." Yet as a senior citizen of this world I grieve for them. I grieve for your Army pfc Diego F. Rincon of Georgia, who a day before he was killed in Najaf wrote to his mother, "I know there will be deaths and fatalities burials and tears... may my trust in God remain unshaken... I pray for better days, that these days shall pass and that a blessed road will emerge as a gift of God." I grieve for all those you have sent to war on a false pretext Mr. President. I am no crystal-gazer nor are you, but what surprises me

is that ignoring the writing on the wall you acted like a shortsighted head of government, oblivious of the lessons of history. Mr. President, I dare say, we know one when we see one, for in this country of ours we have been fated to have more than our share of them!

The end of three and a half decades of the stifling Saddam years has indeed brought relief to many Iraqis, but at the same time, they detest what they regard as US

crystal-gazer, I hardly foresaw that, to say nothing of rebuilding the destroyed infrastructure, due to the law and order situation, even the essential task of restoring water and electricity in the war-torn country has not been possible in this whole year of your occupation.

Now, about the so-called "Weapons of Mass Destruction." You were so impatient to launch your aggression against Iraq that you would not allow the UN weap-

onished book, "Disarming Iraq" that Saddam indeed had no such weapons at that time. He has however stated that Weapons of Mass Destruction or not, he thinks that you had already made up your mind to invade Iraq. He said in a CNN interview the other day that he was not sure who had goaded you into that course of action, Blair or Powell, but that the final responsibility for the decision squarely rested on your shoulders.

office in your land. But there is a feeling, not entirely unmixed with hope, that should it transpire to the electors, that you were actually lying about the Weapons of Mass Destruction, the question of your reelection will become somewhat uncertain.

I mentioned to you in my previous letter that you had failed to furnish any definite proof of Saddam's relations with Al Qaeda. Al Qaeda are dangerous and are

right. Nearer your home, President and Nobel Laureate Jimmy Carter said it all by emphasizing that, "that was a war based on lies and misinterpretations from London and from Washington, claiming falsely that Saddam was responsible for the 9/11 attacks, claiming falsely that Iraq had Weapons of Mass Destruction."

Mr. Bush, I broached another subject in my last letter. That was about your treatment of the United Nations. The United Nations has been a great achievement of the post Second World War generation. Bypassing it at the time of your Iraq adventure, was, I held, an insult to our age and time. Now you are wanting the United Nations to pull your chestnuts out of the Iraq fire. You as the head of the mightiest nation in the world, must appreciate that the United Nations will lose its relevance, if it is to act only at your bidding.

Mr. Bush, the moot point is that Afghanistan, and the partly-US created Taliban, and the once US supported Saddam, and the Al Qaeda terrorists are not all birds of the same feather. The mainly Saudi terrorists who are responsible for 9/11, and the suicide bombers and those who almost daily perish in violent activities, are they all out of their minds, or could not there be something in their beliefs and perceptions that drives them towards their crimes? Has it ever occurred to you, Mr. Bush, that your policies in West Asia are viewed by them as being so unjust towards Israel that its partial actions are more often than not condoned by your great country? Could it not be that your overwhelming presence in their energy sector in their part of the world, and your capacity and power to use them for your present and future needs, in disregard of their perceived national interests, have over the years turned them into such desperados that their lives have ceased to have any meaning for them and consequently, in their consideration, the lives of others! Could it not be, Mr. Bush, that the healing touch of understanding, compassion, and fair play, by a nation as mighty as yours, could achieve, in this situation what your

sabre-rattling has not only failed to, but has also, over time, compounded?

Mr. Bush, I hardly need emphasize that I dimly view your words and actions with regard to West Asia in the pursuance of which you are clearly being led up the garden path by the interested lobbies of your country and those of beyond. It could also well be that you identify your own interests with theirs to a degree that you have lost sight of the logic and reasoning that your very powerful job demands of you. Mr. Bush, the problem is that you live in a world where the comfort zones of some of your compatriots are isolated, by the impervious walls of affluence, from the demanding ground realities of our time and age. But then there is something about democracy that holds out hope, not to speak only of your great country, which has contributed so much to the enrichment of our lives in this age, but also in this impoverished land where democratic values so admirably held forth by your Founding Fathers are hardly respected. The hope in this case is that Senator John Kerry seems to be earnestly and convincingly questioning your handling of foreign policy issues and that the chances are that, much to your discomfiture, foreign policy might emerge as an important issue in the ensuing US presidential elections.

Faruq Choudhury is a former Foreign Secretary.

## FRANKLY SPEAKING

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occupation of their country. By taking upon yourself the task of Saddam's removal, which essentially was the concern of the Iraqis, you have fallen into a quagmire from where it will be difficult to extricate yourself. The handpicked Iraqi Governing Council is hardly likely to succeed in giving the country a workable constitution and a durable administrative system. These can never be imposed on any nation. I did tell you in my last letter Mr. Bush, that your presumption that with "Saddam's exit and consequent irrelevance, benign wind of democracy will blow in Iraq, seems utterly unrealistic." Ambassador Paul Bremer, perhaps more than anyone else, must be appreciative of this.

I had also stated in my letter, "your bombs will destroy Iraq's infrastructure that will be rebuilt with Iraq's oil wealth by your industries at a huge profit." No

ons inspectors a little more time to look into your allegations to their full satisfaction. Now Mr. Hans Blix has revealed in his recently pub-

Mr. Bush! you know as much as anyone else that by a strange quirk of the interpretation of your electoral law, you now hold the highest

religious bigots. Saddam might have been dangerous, but a religious bigot he was not. Mr. Bush, those who indulged in their hellish action on the Twin Towers and the Pentagon are, in fact, enemies, not only of Islam, but also of humanity at large. You have made a hotch-potch of it all by mixing up Saddam with Al Qaeda. The whole world shared your grief of 9/11. Innocent people from so many countries, including mine, were the victims of that dastardly action; but you disappointed the world by using this to satisfy your shortsighted and ill-conceived political and economic objectives. Even respected world leaders like Mahathir Mohamad have said that with your "closed mind" you have made the world a more dangerous place than before. He has disclosed that he wrote to you before your invasion of Iraq to warn that it would encourage terrorism rather than reduce it. He thought that among other happenings, the recent attacks in Madrid prove him



# The Iraq war a year later and George Bush's tangled web of deception

RON CHEPESIU

It seems like yesterday that I was in Bangladesh watching the Iraq War unfold. I shared with my Bangladeshi friends the feeling of outrage at the Bush administration's reckless actions in the region, its violation of international law and its disregard -- and even contempt -- for those countries, including its closest allies, brave enough to defy its will.

But it's now a year later, and the world community is trying to make sense of what has happened and is happening in Iraq. Every day this week, the White House will be

**So here we are one year later and the Bush administration continues to lie to justify the illegal Iraq War. Meanwhile, its credibility on the world stage keeps eroding, Iraq has become a "disaster" as the new Spanish Prime Minister aptly pointed out, and the real War on Terrorism sputters along, thanks to Bush's reckless foreign policy. Once again we are reminded how important this year's US presidential election is for the US and the world community.**

putting its best spin on the Iraq War, which began on March 19, and try to tie the conflict to the broader War on Terrorism. The spin campaign actually began last

week, when Rumsfeld proclaimed with a straight face that "after all peaceful options had been exhausted" did the president and the coalition order the liberation of

Iraq. Given what's happened in the past year and given the ton of evidence that contradicts Rumsfeld's contention, I marvel how our secretary of defence can say such a thing without blushing in embarrassment. It appears he and other Bush administration officials believe that, if they tell a big lie long enough, the public will start believing it.

The fact is the Bush administration did not "exhaust every peaceful option" before liberating Iraq. It certainly didn't allow UN weapons inspectors to do their job and find the evidence to prove Saddam had weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and posed an "imminent threat" to the civilized world.

We can recall Secretary of State Colin Powell presentation in early February 2003 to the United Nations Security Council, arguing that Saddam had violated UN resolutions, agreed to after the 1991 Gulf War, requiring Iraq to disarm. As I wrote early in "The Daily Star, even Colin Powell didn't really believe in the horse manure the neo-conservative clique running the White House was trying to feed the world community.

We all, it has turned out, were right. Since the Iraq War's end, it has come to light that the Bush administration based its charges upon evidence that didn't really prove Iraq had WMD.

So this raises an important question to which we need an answer: did the Bush administration exaggerate the Iraq threat or pressure intelligence analysts to tailor their assessments of Iraq's weapons programme to bolster its case for war?

The White House and Republican leaders in Congress have tried to protect the Bush administration by confining the US Senate's Iraq probe to the performance of the CIA and other intelligence agencies. Fortunately, however, the US Senate Intelligence Committee has said it plans to investigate "whether public statements and reports and testimony regarding Iraq were substantiated by intelligence information."

In a clumsy attempt to justify its actions, the Bush administration now is claiming it never used the word "imminent" to describe the Iraq threat. But the American media, to its credit, has been digging up the administration's statements of a year ago that shows otherwise. The Los Angeles Times, for instance, noted that "Bush described Hussein's regime as a 'grave and growing' danger and warned that the United States 'could not wait for definitive proof' that Hussein had weapons stockpiles."

So much for Rumsfeld's "exhausting every peaceful option" contention. Do these guys ever talk with each other to get their story straight before going public?

Meanwhile other Bush administration officials are working hard to keep alive the bogus arguments for the war. In a radio interview last January, Vice President Dick Cheney once again made the long but discredited claim that the military trailers found in Iraq were Saddam's so called mobile bio weapons labs.

"That in my mind, is a serious danger in the hands of a man like Saddam Hussein, and I would deem that conclusive evidence, if you will, that he did, in fact, have weapons of mass destruction," Cheney said.

The truth is the evidence has been anything but conclusive. "The New York Times, for instance, reported that a US State Department memo had cast doubts on the CIA's claim the trailers were being used to manufacture biological weapons. Meanwhile, a *Observer* newspaper report has also concluded that the two trailers were "not mobile germ warfare labs, as was claimed by Tony and President George Bush."

The alleged connection between al-Qaida and Saddam was the other major justification for the war, but this odd couple relationship has also been discredited. Yet once again the Bush administration keeps grasping at straws.

In that radio interview last January, Cheney said there was "overwhelming evidence" of an al-Qaida-Saddam relationship. One of the pieces of "evidence" that Cheney cited was Iraq's harbouring of Abdul Rahman Yasin, a suspect in the 1993 World Trade Centre bombing. What Cheney didn't say was that Iraq had offered to turn over Yasin to the US in 1998 in return for a US statement acknowledging Iraq had no role in the attack, but the Clinton administration refused.

Some US government officials have risked their careers by going public to provide the truth about the al-Qaida-Saddam connection. "We could find no provable connection between Saddam and al-Qaida," one US official told a major US news service earlier this month.

So here we are one year later and the Bush administration continues to lie to justify the illegal Iraq War. Meanwhile, its credibility on the world stage keeps eroding, Iraq has become a "disaster" as the new Spanish Prime Minister aptly pointed out, and the real War on Terrorism sputters along, thanks to Bush's reckless foreign policy.

Once again we are reminded how important this year's US presidential election is for the US and the world community. I, like many other Americans, hope to wave bye-bye to George W. Bush, Jr. next January as he hops a plane for the long ride to retirement at his ranch in Texas.

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