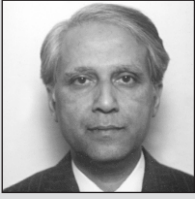


# The chimera of UN reforms



MUHAMMAD ZAMIR

CONTEMPORARY events have sharpened the debate about the credibility of the United Nations and questions are being asked frequently as to whether the Security Council as it stands today, can contain or constrain US power. What is being debated is no longer a matter of process, i.e., restricted and exclusive permanent membership and the right to veto, but also what can be done with the sole superpower's great advantage that accrues from its extraordinary technical and military might.

Efforts are now underway to enlarge the Security Council so that there is broader representation. The question is whether such a move will enable the UN Security Council and the UN System to play a more significant role in a US dominated world.

The precept of UN Charter reform with concomitant institutional changes have been on multilateral

agenda for some time. It is interesting to note however that in nearly 60 years, there have been only three amendments to the UN Charter -- all dealing only with seat numbers in two of the six principal organs -- once for the Security Council and on two occasions for the UN Economic and Social Council. It has been rare but 'reform' of sorts have taken place. Constitutional reform has been unusual, but reform measures of administrative nature have not been

among the great powers being a prerequisite because they believed that this would help to maintain peace. This was in contrast with the League of Nations' earlier format of a general executive committee for all of that Organisation's functions. It was felt that the League's structure would not work in a post Second World War scenario that demanded many decisions of substance.

This elitist approach was opposed

being negative to their vested interests.

Decolonisation in the Sixties increased UN membership from 51 to 114 and led to newly decolonised members demanding a better reflection of their priorities within the UN system. This sentiment led to a historic debate during the 18th UN General Assembly and serious lobbying during the next year. This eventually resulted in the Security Council

and increase in the Membership of the Security Council and Other Matters Related to the Security Council. The very nature of the name of this Group indicates the latent difficulties being faced within the Group pertaining to any form of decision making. I believe, it is most unlikely that any consensus will emerge from their deliberations.

The fact that the US has emerged as the only Superpower with global reach has complicated matters further. It has marginalised the United Nations and the rest of the world. It has also not helped that the European Union is still so divided over its Common Security and Defense Policy and that the NATO has grown weaker in terms of resources.

Some criticise the USA today as having become 'hegemonistic' and intolerant of multilateral efforts within the matrix of the United Nations. This is probably true.

However, the reason for the downward slide in the influence of the UN appears to be directly related to the resource constraint that it faces every time it seeks to play an effective role. The UN finds that its operations are dependent largely on US largesse and financial support. This consequently creates a situation where a threat is seen to be grave enough for UN intervention only if it fits the US prescription.

This approach also materially reduces the possibility of other countries being able to exert pressure on the USA so that it agrees to UN reform.

Professor Thomas G. Weiss has correctly pointed out in his recent article on the United Nations in 'The Washington Quarterly' (Autumn 2003) that the UN faces essentially two problems when the Security Council will act "as a multiplier for US power" and "how it can persuade the US that acting multilaterally will be in its interest." Events, as they continue to unfold in Iraq bear testimony to these raw nerves.

As it stands today, it is unlikely that the built-in advantage of veto will be lost soon through another General Assembly Emergency Special Session and the 'Uniting for Peace' procedure. The last time this happened was in the early 1960s (the Congo crisis) and has not come to pass since. Nevertheless, universal moral pressure will probably be the more effective method for creating the necessary restraint in the exercise of the veto wielding powers.

The situation within the UN framework is bound to a great extent by rhetoric. This will make important reform less than likely. Consistent with existing concern, there will in all probably be small measures that will lead to more openness and 'democratic accountability' in decision making of the Security Council. There may also be greater visibility of important deliberations and decisions, through candid and open exchanges with independent experts and representatives of civil society. These steps will not require Charter changes and will therefore not be viewed as a 'mixed bag' by the Permanent Members.

The international political process will urge greater scrutiny and will demand reform. However, whether we like it or not, hunt for change in the structure of UN Organs will have to have the core blessings of Washington. The match will have to be played out in that capital and the result declared later in New York. It is also unlikely that this will happen in a US Presidential Election year.

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## POST BREAKFAST

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so uncommon. With changes of UN Secretaries General we have also seen routine policy changes in personnel structure and management techniques.

The issue that nevertheless continues to draw world attention is that of meaningful change reflecting changing world politics and its growing membership.

It would be important to recall here that UN founders deliberately appear to have composed a limited Security Council (with unanimity

by some during the San Francisco Conference where the UN Charter was drafted, but formation of the UN was not impeded because general opinion anticipated some review soon. In fact, Article 109 of the UN Charter envisaged the scope for a General Conference 'for the purpose of reviewing the Charter'. Accessing to this however became impossible given the polarisation of UN member countries during the Cold War and subsequently because the Permanent 5 also viewed any such challenge as

membership being expanded in 1965 from 11 to 15 on the basis of UN General Assembly Resolution No. 1990 adopted earlier in December 1963. This change in membership structure of the Security Council settled matters for the next two and half decades among the grumbling constituents.

Aspiration for reform went dormant, but did not really die. Peace-keeping operations in Afghanistan, Namibia, Cambodia, Nicaragua, end of the Iran-Iraq war and the invasion of Kuwait re-ignited the focus and the ambition in many countries to play a more central role. They wanted not only to be able to defend their views in the Security Council but also wanted to translate this into the power of vote within that Council. These States expressed the necessity to restructure the Security Council's composition and its anachronistic procedures.

The P-5 have been stonewalling this move by pointing out that there has been a steep decline in the use of substantive vetoes and that there have been only 12 such invocations between January 1990 and June 2003 as opposed to 193 over the preceding 45 years. This explanation has nevertheless not satisfied Germany, Japan, India, Egypt, Brazil and Nigeria.

Any possibility of UN Security Council reform has also been greatly reduced because of a kind of 'political paralysis' that exists within the non Permanent-5 community over important factors. They are today apparently unable to decide on their candidatures for the newly permanent seats in the Security Council, the total number acceptable for expansion, their geographical distribution and also on how these additional seats will rotate through the various geographical regions.

Within the industrialised countries, bickering is going on over whether Italy should be bypassed in favour of Germany and Japan. Similarly, within South Asia the ambition of India is being opposed by its rival Pakistan. Argentina is equally unhappy with Brazil being perceived as the natural candidate from South America. There is also competition from South Africa with regard to Nigeria.

All these aspects and factors are still being debated by a Group with the lengthiest name in the 'annals of multilateral deliberations' -- the Oewgerimscmsc-standing for the 'Open-ended Working Group on the question of Equitable Representation and Increase in the Group on the Question of Equitable Representation

# Why are Muslims so 'shocked and awed' by Yassin's assassination?

SHAHED AMANULLAH

I have to admit that I've been taken aback with the level of anger surrounding the killing of Hamas founder Sheikh Ahmed Yassin. Muslims both inside and outside of Palestine seem genuinely shocked -- shocked, I tell you! -- that Israel would dare to take out the spiritual head of Hamas in such a dramatic and bloody manner. And the loudest cries seem to be coming from those who are well aware of, and have no problem with, Yassin's ideology of the use of violence -- including suicide bombings against civilians -- as the "only way" to liberate Palestine. The very genuine grievances suffered by Palestinians seem to have nurtured an illogical expectation that both sides are bound to different rules of war, that somehow, if a Palestinian leader calls for young men to blow themselves up among Israeli civilians, a retaliation in kind against the leader is unacceptable. Of course, I'm told by friends that Israel should have instead arrested Yassin and given him a fair trial if they thought he had blood on his hands. I can only shake my head at the cognitive dissonance. Do these people think that the Muslims of old, after losing a battle, would protest indignantly to the victors? Yassin and Hamas declared war on Israel, an obviously stronger adversary, and they got war in return. Did they really expect a lawsuit instead?

The truth is, the death of Yassin must be a little bittersweet among Israeli strategists, for the cause of Zionism has had no better friend in the last two decades than Hamas. The two fed off each other in a love-hate relationship that brought out the worst in each other. In Hamas (which Israel touted at its inception as a counterweight to the popularity of the PLO), Israel has found everything from an incentive for hyper-militarisation to a poster boy for their "security wall". And each heavy-handed strike directed at Hamas sparked a recruiting drive whose success was directly proportional to the "collateral damage" Israel caused. And innocent Israelis and Palestinians -- most of whom are ready for a two-state solution if their leadership would ever get around to it -- get caught in the middle.

What surprises me most is that so many Muslims have backed Hamas' military strategy for securing Palestinian rights, even though the heavy weaponry is on the wrong side. The level of poverty and despair among the average Palestinian locked in Israel's occupation noose is at an all time low, while their Israeli counterparts basically complain about not being able to go clubbing in Tel Aviv on the weekend. Israeli pilots can take out Palestinians in the streets of Gaza as if they were playing a video game, while those seeking reprisals for those attacks run into a literal wall. Israelis may be hurting, but Palestinians are reaching the end of a frayed rope. It doesn't take a genius to see where this is heading -- most certainly not in the direction of Palestinian liberation.

Yassin's death (perhaps not coincidentally) overshadowed the one year anniversary of the death of Rachel Corrie and fatal shooting of Tom Hurndall, both of whose non-violent tactics against the Israeli occupation contrasts sharply with that of Hamas. While Israeli officials cite Hamas often in their justifications for military and occupation activities, they would prefer

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that the world had never heard of Rachel or Tom. A strategy of non-violent action that focuses the world's attention squarely where it should be -- on the crimes of the occupation -- is something that Israel has little defence against. Yes, it will be harder for Palestinians to have the same impact as white Westerners, but large numbers of them working together with international supporters cannot be ignored for long.

The killing of Hamas' founder marks a turning point for

Palestinians and an opportunity to re-evaluate their support for the group's military activities. Hamas had the potential to be so much more. Its social institutions have been lifesavers for Palestinians hardest hit by the occupation, and their reputation for avoiding corruption contrasts sharply with Yasser Arafat's ineffectual kleptocracy. But their nihilistic use of suicide bombing to achieve Palestinian rights has eroded their moral high ground, brought Israeli reprisals of increasing severity to more and more Palestinian civilians, and has consumed the lives of innocents on both sides. If real advancement is to be made for Palestinian rights, all who care about justice both inside and outside Palestine should embrace efforts that galvanise compassionate people all over the world to do the right thing, instead of repelling possible supporters with violent tactics and rhetoric.

Yassin's death makes it clear that violent opposition to the occupation will ultimately fail. The tactic of suicide bombing should be buried along with him. If we are to see real progress towards the restoration of Palestinian rights rather than a march towards self-destruction, then Palestine will need more Rachel Corries and fewer Sheikh Yassins.

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