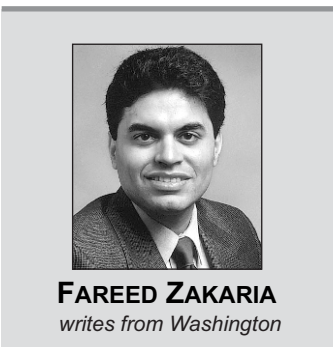


# The President must command



DESPERATE to stop the transition in Iraq from coming apart, the United States has finally done what it said it would never do -- give the United Nations a central political role. It may be too late. The occupation has already been branded an all-American affair and the move might be seen as window dressing. Still, better to try it than persist in the old course. But this rectifies only one of the two major errors of the occupation. The other was to allow a security vacuum to develop within Iraq. Things looked better last week, but sieges in two cities, constant explosions and a tape of a captive American GI are reminders of how grim the situation essentially is. Iraq remains unstable and insecure. If this problem isn't solved, the United Nations can sprinkle all the magic dust it

wants and it will not matter. In fact, things could get worse. After July 1, the United States will have to combat insurgents by working through a sovereign Iraqi government that will have its own constraints. If the insurgency persists, the new government might be seen as weak and never gain the respect of its nation. Reconstruction will slow to a crawl as foreigners leave the country.

The blunt truth is that we still need more troops in Iraq. Yes, it

elections. In those circumstances, and with good diplomacy, we should be able to get some countries to contribute to an international force. Plus, six months of additional training will strengthen the Iraqi security and police forces considerably. Whenever George Bush or Donald Rumsfeld have been asked about the need for more troops, they answer almost identically. If the generals ask for them, they explain, we'll give them what they want. For months they explained that the

military requests. In his book "Supreme Command," Eliot Cohen points out that great wartime leaders always question military strategy and tactics. War, as Clausewitz famously said, is the extension of politics by other means. It takes politicians to make political judgments. If this argument sounds familiar, it's because you heard it often in the fall of 2002, when George Bush had decided to wage war in Iraq. The uniformed military argued that a successful Iraq operation would

and tactics. Militaries, even superb ones like America's, have institutional biases. For example, armies tend to fight a counterinsurgency the way they fight war -- with massive force. The American Army is smart, and trained in counterinsurgency, but does tend to revert to what it does best. The problem is that this military strategy has terrible political consequences - creating broader support for the insurgency -- as Algeria, Vietnam, Northern Ireland and countless other examples show. Armies also don't like doing peacekeeping. Patrolling streets, fighting crime, making contact with locals isn't what people join the army to do. It also interferes with force protection, an understandable and legitimate concern of commanders. And yet, success in Iraq will depend on successful peacekeeping.

What we need now is a totally engaged commander in chief, immersed in every element of the Iraq operation, who is willing to listen carefully to generals but also willing to push them to achieve political objectives. This is not a job that can be delegated to the military or anybody else.

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**What the Iraq question needs right now is a totally engaged American president, immersed in every element of the military operation.**

would be nice to have foreign troops or to have well-trained Iraqi forces. But for now neither option exists. We have a choice between more American troops or continued instability.

The Third Infantry Division is apparently going back in. We have two to three divisions earmarked for a conflict in Korea that could be moved. Overall we could probably add 50,000 to 60,000 troops to the current force in Iraq. This bulked-up presence would be needed for about six months. By July there should be an Iraq government partnering with the United Nations to write a constitution and hold

military didn't want more troops. Suddenly this changed last week.

Hiding behind the military is disingenuous. The generals know full well that they are not supposed to ask for more troops. For months, lower-level military officers openly admitted that they needed more troops, but their generals were too worried about crossing Rumsfeld and Bush. (General Abizaid tried squaring this circle six months ago when he explained to The New York Times that of course he needed more troops but only foreign troops not U.S. ones.)

In any event, the job of civilian leaders is not simply to rubber-stamp

require several hundred thousand troops. Rumsfeld and his deputy, Paul Wolfowitz, were openly dismissive of the military's views. The president let reporters know that he was reading Cohen's book to signal to the generals that he was happy to overrule them.

One is tempted to say, if Bush was so mindful of what the military wanted, he should have listened to them in 2002. But generals are neither always right nor wrong. As Cohen concludes, a good supreme commander will give the military leeway but will be constantly asking questions, examining assumptions and searching for new strategies

# Whither Bush in Iraq: Between the rock and the hard place

RON CHEPESIUK

ONE knows the Bush administration has credibility problems when its secretive leader deems it necessary to meet with the press five time in less than a week. George Bush, Jr., after all, is well known for his disdain of the media. The most powerful man on Earth readily admits he doesn't read newspapers, preferring instead to get the news he needs from those closest to him.

But there he was at the press conference on April 13, looking a bit uncomfortable in the glare of the cameras as 41 million Americans tuned in to hear what he had to say about Iraq. You notice I didn't qualify "quagmire" with "growing" because it's obvious even with the best of the Bush administration's spin that the U.S. is mired in a quicksand of its making and is sinking slowly by the day.

In the press conference Bush vowed that the U.S. will "finish the work," but he didn't provide any specific plan on how it would be done. That's an extremely important point, since the insurgency continues to grow in strength and numbers and a June 30 deadline looms for the handing over of power in Iraq to a new government.

Also, Bush needs to be forthcoming with specifics because with each passing day more American soldiers and contractors are reported missing or killed, while supply lines continue to be sabotaged. It's evident that the coalition forces are losing strategic control of Iraq. About a week ago, one defence contractor told the Knight Ridder news service that "the situation is getting worse" and "while the U.S.

**INSIDE AMERICA**

**We really need to ask: does the Bush administration really want democracy in Iraq? In a prescient op-ed piece in the Los Angeles Times, Carolyn Eisenberg, a professor of U.S. foreign policy at Hofstra University in Philadelphia pointed out that Iraq's interim constitution signed by the 25-member Iraq Governing Council last March 12 was a "deceptive document designed to obscure the proposed transfer of power."**

led coalition controls pockets within Iraq, the insurgents control the roads."

As I wrote this column, the yahoo web site was reporting that the coalition had closed two major highways into Baghdad on April 17.

Given Iraq's instability, it's remarkable that the Bush administration still insists it can meet the June 30 deadline. With less than eighty days to D-day, it's not even clear to whom the U.S. plans to turn over the reigns of power. That's just one deadline remember. People tend to forget that just six months after the June 30 deadline elections are supposed to be held.

What can the Bush administration do to turn the crisis around? Will sending more American troops into the Iraq cauldron help stabilise the situation so that Uncle Sam can achieve its objectives?

The fact is the neo-con juggernaut has put itself between the rock and the hard place. Failing to meet the June 30 deadline will reinforce suspicions that the U.S. wants to keep "control" of Iraq indefinitely. That will certainly lead to more widespread resistance in Iraq. On the other hand, a disorderly transfer

of power will not be in the Uncle Sam's best interests either.

But who will take charge? Paul Bremer has been on American television a lot lately, defending Bush's Iraq policy, but he has never provided any specifics to answer the big question.

As the clock ticks, it's imperative that this question be answered. I find it disturbing how easy the American public and its elected leaders are letting the Bush administration off the hook. No one is demanding to know what role the U.S. will play after the turnover, how long U.S. troops will remain in Iraq or what will be the bottom line cost for the Iraq experiment. If Bush expects to spend another four years in the White House, he needs to provide answers before next November's elections.

It's being suggested that the UN can bail the U.S. out in Iraq. After all, it does have valuable expertise in rebuilding postwar nations. A major UN role would most likely bring more foreign countries on board, but why would that make any difference? Many Iraqis see the UN as an appendix to U.S. power. Lest we forget -- that's why the UN headquarters was bombed to smithereens last August. Why should we expect broader international involvement to dampen growing Iraqi anger against the foreign presence in their country?

At the end of the day, the odds are long that the U.S. will achieve its professed strategic objective in Iraq: establishing democracy, whatever that's supposed to mean. It took the colonists who came to America 150 years to establish a democratic form of government, and it can be argued that our democracy is still a work in progress.

But here we are, a mere year after the so called liberation of Iraq, and the country is supposed to have all the prerequisites it needs to move on the fast track to democracy. In a country with no democratic tradition, the mullahs are the real

power in Iraq, as current events are showing, and they have a lot to lose if Western style democracy is established. The mullahs will not leave gently into the night.

We really need to ask: does the Bush administration really want democracy in Iraq? In a prescient op-ed piece in the Los Angeles Times, Carolyn Eisenberg, a professor of U.S. foreign policy at Hofstra University in Philadelphia pointed out that Iraq's interim constitution signed by the 25-member Iraq Governing Council last March 12 was a "deceptive document designed to obscure the proposed transfer of power."

Professor Eisenberg put the Bush-neo con shell game in a nutshell. "While desiring the appearance of democracy for domestic and international purposes, it is afraid to surrender authority," she wrote. "Its problem is that a free Iraq is unlikely to implement the U.S. agenda: a secular state, permanent military bases, American direction of the oil industry, a privatised economy and a foreign policy consonant with Washington."

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# Looking to the future with hope

MOHAMMAD AMJAD HOSSAIN

WHEN Bangladesh established itself as an independent country, at the beginning of 1972 the predominant opinion in the western world was that this country, if left to itself, would not survive long. That because of its high density of population and insufficient natural resources, it had little basis for survival. Former US Secretary of State Dr. Henry Kissinger reportedly described Bangladesh as a basket case while the World Bank, which is usually restrained in this, respect also spoke in its first report about Bangladesh as a hopeless case. Certainly, Bangladesh could not have survived well the first years of its independence without massive help from the international donor community.

However, this country, in spite of all certainly legitimate criticism about its early political conditions and inefficient public administration, has, over the years, brought about developments in social, economic and political arena, and in some sectors has achieved significant successes, which have made it a respected development partner not only in the third world, but also in the international comity of nations. What could be mentioned here is its political role in the conflict region, its role in the establishment of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and as a member of the Commonwealth. Apart from these, Bangladesh has made some such achievements in its 32 years history, which no one had dreamed of earlier.

These achievements, which the country had made, are:

First of all, there is almost total (more than 90%) self-sufficiency in food for its population of 130 million. Secondly, reduction in the growth of population, from more than 3 percent in 70's to now 1.7 percent, due to a successful population control programme. Thirdly, self-employment and poverty reduction through microcredit, mainly of the rural population by non-government institutions, such as Grameen Bank, which in now being replicated by more than 50 countries in the world. The former President of the United States of America, Bill Clinton spoke highly of this achievement. NGOs like BRAC, which has been active in recent years particularly in the general education sector, and also others such as, Proshika and GSS are doing very well in rural development, basic education, health care etc. Finally, the introduction of compulsory school attendance in 1991 and free education for girls up to twelve grade in 2001 and a large-scale general education programme, are contributing towards rise in literacy rate.

These developments and experiences are positive indications for the future development of this country, but present chaotic conditions in the country do not speak well for the future. An indispensable prerequisite for its further development and independence is internal political stability, strengthening of its

democratic parliamentary structures.

Bangladesh had the experience of the first general election under the new concept of neutral caretaker government in 1991. Through a free and fair election BNP came to power, but a period of great political instability marked by increasing number of hartals (strikes) and violent political clashes led to the dissolution of Parliament on 24 November 1995. The following election on 12 June, 1996 under similar neutral caretaker interim government, brought the Awami League in power for five years. Then the BNP won the general elections in 2001 defeating Awami League.

Unfortunately, both the parties did not accept their defeat with good grace. The people expected that when a process of democratisation has begun in the country it must evolve to their benefit. The existing

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political situation in the country manifests to a different story now. Boycotting of the session of the parliament and corruption by politicians and bureaucrats overshadowed the development in other sectors. Berlin based Transparency International gave Bangladesh the title of number one corrupt country in the world in its reports of 2001 and 2002.

Both Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia should have considered each other as fair political opponent, who have in common, anyway, the traumatic experience of the assassination of their close members of family, but their personal ego stands in the way of political understanding. As of now, their politics did not bring any significant development in the country. They are just following the legacy of their father and husband, respectively.

The human rights situation in Bangladesh cannot be considered satisfactory. Bangladesh in fact has a constitutional law, which is based on separation of powers. The reality, however, looks a bit different. The judiciary has not yet been separated from the executive. That remains a big problem.

A special problem is presented by the situation of the tribal people in Chittagong Hill Tracts. They were

suppressed especially at the time of military rule and often made to flee to India due to the forced settlement of Bengalee peasants. However, the government of Awami League had succeeded in signing peace accord with tribal groups towards peaceful solution of the conflict. A peaceful solution and a balance between the Bengalee settlers and the traditional indigenous people should be arrived at in the interest of the country.

The economic situation in Bangladesh an LDC, with 130 million people (at time of independence 1971-1972 about 80-90 million, with a gross domestic product in 1975 of about \$ 28 billion dollars and a per capita income of approximately \$224), can be considered as moderately satisfactory. Until the end of 1995, the macro economic data showed some stability and, if only modest, a real growth (4.7%). The exports and export profits especially are showing considerable rate of growth and also the currency reserve of Bangladesh (sufficient for a 6-month import volume) is satisfactory. The growth has steadily arrived at 5.5 percent in fiscal 2003-2004 while there is a forecast for further increase by one percent in the next fiscal year. This growth is attributable to the very positive development in the garment industry, apart from successful bumper crop harvest-ing.

After the discovery of extensive natural resource base, specially gas, foreign investors are showing increasing interest for investment in Bangladesh. Export base could be expanded by exporting gas, which could generate foreign exchange earning. On the other hand, the government should devise proper plan for best utilisation of gas domestically. In the absence of meter system a considerable amount of gas is being misused. In the meantime, Bangladesh government finances about 45 percent of its annual development budget from its own resources. That is good news.

Bangladesh is known in the media of all the western countries as a country of catastrophe, hunger and poverty, of overpopulation and of constant aid from abroad. But in the 32 years of its independence, Bangladesh has proved that it can tackle its own problems to an increasing extent, only the politicians have proved otherwise. By their imprudent actions, they make the people of this country ludicrous and laughing-stock in the comity of nations. Even the present government has miserably failed to properly govern the country. Unbridled corruption and total lawlessness have caused concern among the saner sections in the country and that is why they are looking for a third force in politics to save the country from any abysmal crisis.

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