

# Muslim troops in Iraq: Is it a possibility? Are the floods due to climate change?



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request for Muslim troops  
\* Iraqi people from all parts should back the Iraqi government's request

Before we examine briefly these points, it is appropriate to recognise the UN role in Iraq under the Security Council resolution 1546 of 8 June, 2004.

Let us make one fact crystal clear at the outset. Although the UN resolution 1546 provides some kind of legitimacy to the interim government,

UN in matters of security in Iraq. The above paragraphs show that the resolution has not given the UN a mandate to look after the security, although the Bush administration wants to give the impression that troops of other countries, if sent to Iraq, will work under the UN mandate. This interpretation seems to be misplaced. If troops are sent to Iraq, they will work under the supreme command of the US and not of the UN. The most important question is :

a neutral body in the eyes of most people in Iraq because most Iraqis suffered during the days of crippling sanctions where thousands of children died because of lack of medicines and equipment. Therefore many believe the attack on the UN building in Iraq last August, killing many UN officials, was due to the misperception of the role of the UN in the country. It is doubtful whether the UN, under the prevailing chaotic situation, can look after effectively the security in Iraq.

The Saudi proposal also makes it clear that it is not only the Iraqi interim government that requests for Muslim troops but also that request must have the backing from "all parts of the Iraqi people". This means that Shi'as, Sunnis and Kurds must agree that Muslim troops will replace the US-led forces. There is serious doubt whether Iraqi Kurds in the north will agree to this proposal because their semi-independent status is being protected by the US-led troops. Once the US-led troops are withdrawn, they fear that Baghdad rule will prevail over them.

It appears that unless the US agrees to the conditions of the Saudi proposal, there is no likelihood of Muslim troops in Iraq. Furthermore, Iraq does not accept any troops from its immediate neighbours. This implies that troops from Turkey, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Syria and Iran are ruled out. This leaves other Muslim countries to provide troops.

Given the scale of violence in Iraq, it is doubtful if any Muslim country is prepared to dispatch its troops to Iraq. Moreover, overwhelming majority of population in Muslim countries including non-Arab countries, such as, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan and Iran, are opposed to Iraqi war because it was launched without UN approval. Given the illegitimacy of the war in Iraq, it is difficult to legitimise it through the back door.

In all probability, the proposal may not see light of the day for the reasons stated above. However, the Saudi proposal has given a new window of opportunity for the US to withdraw its forces from Iraq. It is doubtful whether the US will acknowledge the reality that the presence of its troops in Iraq is an incitement to violence in the country.

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SALEEMUL HUQ

AS Bangladesh faces another major flood affecting millions of people and large parts of the country the question is being asked whether these floods are caused by human induced climate change? While it may not be possible to attribute this particular flood event to climate change, nevertheless the enhanced frequency of such events can be predicted in future due to changes in the global climate system caused by emissions of greenhouse gases by human activities.

That the global climate is warming due to the accumulation of greenhouse gases (such as carbon dioxide and methane) in the atmosphere is a well-documented fact (the levels have almost doubled from pre-industrial times). The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) is the body consisting of several hundred of the world's leading scientists set up by the United Nations to examine the evidence regarding climate change. In its last (third) report published in 2001 it unequivocally stated that human induced climate change is a fact and is undoubtedly happening. These conclusions are based on a combination of many observations from all parts of the globe (from the polar regions to the tropics) of unprecedented changes in climatic patterns along with global circulation models (GCMs), which also predict quite conclusively that the atmosphere will definitely get warmer over the next five to ten decades. They also predict with a very high degree of confidence that such an atmospheric warming will cause sea levels to rise by several meters over the next five to seven hundred years.

However, while the predictions have a high degree of confidence over the long term (i.e. hundred years or more) the degree of confidence over the short (five to ten years) and medium (ten to twenty years) term is less. It is also relatively difficult to model the changes in variability of the climate, which may be caused by global atmospheric warming. As floods and cyclones represent the extremes of natural climatic variations we are naturally interested to know what is likely to happen to such extreme events in a warmer world? Although the climate modellers are not able to make

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PHOTO: HM HASIBUL HASAN

Flood affected countryside (Ghior upazila, Manikganj)

accurate predictions about such extreme events in the short term they are able to say that the likelihood of extreme events will indeed become more frequent (if not necessarily more severe). Thus, one in twenty-year event (such as the current floods) is possibly likely to become one in five-year event. This is already demonstrated by the fact that the last flood of similar magnitude occurred not twenty years ago (as we might have expected without any global warming) but only six years ago in 1998. While this does not prove conclusively that this flood is due to global warming -- it does indicate that the frequency of such floods in future will be much greater than in the past.

The consequence of this knowledge is that we need to be better prepared for such floods in future. In the case of the present floods we got the warning about rising waters days ahead and were able to take some (although, admittedly quite inadequate) measures. In future there will no longer be any excuse for saying that we did not know there would be floods. We must prepare every year as if we will be flooded. This does not necessarily mean that floods of such a magnitude will occur every year but the prudent course to follow is to prepare for the worst-case scenario.

This requires a whole set of changes in our attitudes and actions ranging from improved meteorological and hydrological information for prediction and warning; making flood warning more accurate with respect to which localities will be affected, by how much and when; improving evacuation procedures, providing safe shelters on raised grounds, building

all future roads at higher levels with more sluice gates to allow flow of flood water; building protective embankments for high capital value infrastructure or densely populated areas only (it will be impossible to protect everyone and everywhere); stockpile water purification tablets, medicines and dry food; prepare health centers for diarrheal patients and snake bites; prepare seed beds for seedlings after the floods recede; as well as a hundred other actions to be taken from national policy makers to sectoral ministries, local administrations, political parties, NGOs, colleges, schools down to individual citizens. We need to be ready for such disasters every year from now on as if putting the country on a war footing. If the floods are not as bad then we will not have lost much, but if they are bad then we will be better prepared and better preparation will reduce the adverse impacts considerably.

Although it may seem from the above analysis that the future for Bangladesh looks very bleak indeed with respect to future floods, it does not necessarily have to be that bad. There are at least a couple of important (albeit small) silver linings behind the dark and rain-laden clouds. Firstly, with better information, preparation, warning, action and rehabilitation we can reduce the adverse impacts of severe events such as this year's floods (this was well demonstrated during the floods of 1998 and hopefully will be demonstrated again in 2004). Our national and local administration, NGOs, Red Cross and private citizens have risen to the challenge in the past and can do so again in the future.

The second aspect is the fact that floods due to climate change (even if not hundred percent attributable to climate change) are fundamentally different from "normal" floods. Even though scientists cannot (yet) attribute a percentage to how much the floods are due to climate change they are reasonably sure that such a percentage is a positive number greater than zero. Whether it is 0.1, 1.0 or 10 percent is not possible to attribute at the moment (but it will be possible within a few years) it is definitely not zero anymore. This fact opens up an entirely new level of calculation for the floods. Whereas in the past they could be attributed entirely to acts of God (or nature), in future they will also be (if only partially) attributable to acts of man as well. It is also well known which countries are primarily responsible for the problem of global warming -- namely the rich countries of the world.

Thus, in future we can legitimately claim assistance from the rich countries of the world to face climatic disasters (such as floods) not just through appeals to their charity but as compensation (appealing to their moral responsibility, if not their legal liability). However, in order to obtain financial flows at the level required, Bangladesh must learn to take the problem of climate change much more seriously than it has done so far and must learn to participate in the international negotiations in a much more strategic and planned manner.

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## BOTTOM LINE

Given the scale of violence in Iraq, it is doubtful if any Muslim country is prepared to dispatch its troops to Iraq. Moreover, overwhelming majority of population in Muslim countries including non-Arab countries, such as, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan and Iran, are opposed to Iraqi war because it was launched without UN approval. Given the illegitimacy of the war in Iraq, it is difficult to legitimise it through the back door.

it did not create a UN peace-making force in Iraq. The UN, in terms of the resolution, has been given a very limited role in the political process, leaving security to US-led forces, now euphemistically called "multinational force".

In terms of the resolution, the UN has three-fold specific tasks, i.e. (a) to assist the interim government in convening during the month of July a national conference to select a Consultative Council that will advise the interim Iraqi government, (b) to advise and support the Iraqi authorities on the process for holding elections and (c) to promote dialogue and consensus building on the drafting of a permanent Constitution in Iraq.

The fact that the UN is not in charge of the security in Iraq is evident by the fact that the multinational forces, led by the US, do not wear UN "blue helmets". Furthermore, according to the UN resolution, "the US, on behalf of the multinational force, should report to the Security Council on the progress within three months of the date of the resolution on a quarterly basis thereafter". This clearly points out the responsibility of the US to the

whether the US-backed interim government in Iraq and the US will agree to the Saudi proposal that Muslim troops will replace the US-led forces in Iraq.

Many political analysts believe that they will not agree. There are primarily for two reasons: (a) the very survival of the US-picked interim Iraqi government depends on the presence of the US-led forces and (b) during the year of US Presidential election, the Bush administration will not agree to withdraw its forces from Iraq that may symbolize the weakness and failure of the present US administration.

If Muslim troops work under the auspices of the UN, the Security Council will need to adopt another resolution in which the UN is entrusted with security in Iraq. The new UN mandate will depend on the course of the action favoured by the Bush administration.

Another question is whether the UN is ready to carry out this mandate. The UN has been unfortunately associated with the US in Iraq because of the UN sanctions, pursued vigorously by the US for more than 12 years. Regrettably, the UN is not perceived as

# Population control: Reaching the remaining half

READ "population programmes and directions" by Dr. Syed Jehangir Hyder (Daily Star July 24, 2004) with great interest. Dr. Hyder analyzed the progress and raised pertinent issues in the population programme of Bangladesh. As a person with some involvement in Bangladesh health and population programme during the decade of the seventies, this encouraged me to share some of my thoughts on a subject as important for the country as Population programme is.

Remarkable progress was made in creating awareness and raising use rate of contraceptives currently holding at over 50 per cent. Two things stand out at present. The quality, safety and acceptance of current services need considerable improvement. Second, reaching the remaining half and inducing many of them to use effective contraception of choice will require a different strategy and service delivery. Also, while reaching half the

What are wasteful are further seminars and workshops to enumerate the problems and engage in theoretical platitudes; enough of those are collecting dust on shelves and archives. And let us open the debate based on evidence and be ready to field test some new assumptions. Let us also create some welcome space for the many field workers of the population and health programme of the government and the non-governmental organisations who are usually sidelined in policy and programme debates.

eligible population has been relatively e a s y , raising the contraceptive prevalence rate to 65% and above will be harder. The demographic impact (impact on the size of the population and its age structure) of reaching those who have already "done the reproductive damage" that is those who have had two or more children so far has been relatively modest. Reaching the younger couples and those yet to enter reproductive cycle will yield a bigger impact.

On quality and safety, good clinical

facilities and wider choice of contraceptives of tested quality will be first steps. This is linked with service delivery by knowledgeable and motivated staff. The time has perhaps come to move away from house visits and distribution and move to counseling, choice, and safe service delivery that is much more client/user centered and not target driven. This will require much "unlearning" by present staff but also induction of trained new staff.

Service delivery strategy may include first generating unmet demand from a relatively more sophisticated or choosy future acceptors; many of them will want and appreciate well-rounded information and services namely a wide choice of relevant and meaningful reproductive health services. The strategy should cover the long-term aspects by for example, reaching out to today's young adults and adolescents who will soon enter reproductive age. No doubt, the sustainability of optimum contraceptive prevalence rate and high impact on aggregate population fertility will come from the large younger age group especially the females in this group. And this group will know and demand valid information and high quality service.

As to coverage and scope of services, the programme must move well beyond contraception and limited maternal and child health towards a comprehensive package including adolescent health, safe sex and responsible pregnancy, post contraception care. A life cycle approach covering reproductive health will eventually improve programme performance, relevance, and sustainability. That is what was agreed in the Plan of Action adopted by the International Conference on Population and Development at Cairo in 1994.

Bangladesh population programme has made great strides. It is even cited as a model in certain aspects. But the strategy of extensive

home distribution of standard contraceptives by an army of field workers has outlived its effectiveness. Now is the time for a strategic shift to timely and relevant information and advice, tailored -to- need service (individualized if you like) within a broad range of reproductive health coverage. So has the time come for viable quality and class of service albeit with a charge, which, many of future users will accept and be willing to pay if the service is safe, discreet, and perceived to be of good quality.

Time has come to embrace consumer-oriented service in tune with today's free market supply of consumer goods and services by choice. Contraception is not another item of consumption by choice; this choice has deep and long term bearing on health and well being of countless individuals and families; their right to know and choose is to be respected and not to be trifled with. This is one thing the Programme has to learn and learn very fast. Right to know should be combined with right things to know. Luckily, much is known already, both in science and technology of reproductive health including contraception and in means and methods of delivering population based services, in several countries (Thailand, Sri Lanka and Indonesia) in the region and beyond. That is waiting to be tapped and then tailored to suit local conditions and demands. Many of these lessons are not beyond the capacity of the Bangladesh programme to grasp and adapt. Bangladesh programme is mature enough with many successes and accumulated experience.

There is no substitute for validated truth; assumptions most likely valid but have to be tested and proven by evidence. Experience counts more than opinions, which are not sufficient guides to decisions. And in population programmes the world over sufficient experience exists

waiting to be consulted and tested.

Research is key to new knowledge and generating fresh evidence. Therefore, the current research and field research in particular must be redesigned with a view to finding what might work better than others in motivation, education, and service quality; above all client needs and attitudes. Most behavioral research is difficult, time consuming and demands sophisticated methods. Yet, behavioral research is a key determinant of sophisticated strategy and successful induction and retention of tomorrow's users.

Bangladesh population programme faces two challenges; these are also great opportunities waiting to be seized. This is a not mere utopian or unrealistic dream. Reaching the remaining half (beyond the present 50% users) is the key to further and sustained decline of aggregate population fertility, which is the goal for the coming decade. Enlarging the scope of coverage, fine tuning the strategy to meet variations of needs and demands, and fresh research-cum-development into behavior and attitude are not options but are essential.

This article is primarily meant to open up the debate and discourse on some of the current challenges and to invite serious examination of viable options. What are wasteful are further seminars and workshops to enumerate the problems and engage in theoretical platitudes; enough of those are collecting dust on shelves and archives. And let us open the debate based on evidence and be ready to field test some new assumptions. Let us also create some welcome space for the many field workers of the population and health programme of the government and the non-governmental organisations who are usually sidelined in policy and programme debates.

Population programme's growth to adulthood under a strategic direction within broad reproductive health perspective has come. Reaching the remaining half is essential if the programme is to take off and reach the goal of reining in population dynamics and stabilize population. That will be a single major contribution to human resources development and poverty reduction.

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