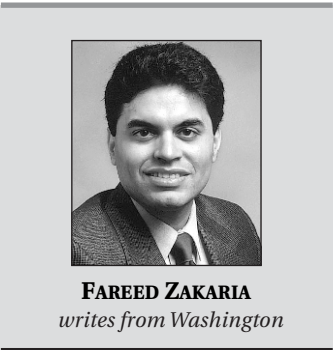


The stealth nuclear threat



FAREED ZAKARIA
writes from Washington

WHO could have imagined that alliance management would be a hot election issue in America? But it is. John Kerry's repeated pledge to restore relations with America's allies has struck a chord. The trouble is, if he is elected president, Kerry is going to find that promise hard to keepat least with America's allies in Europe. Most of them would be delighted to see Kerry win, but that doesn't mean they will be more cooperative on policy issues. Terror is understandably on everyone's mind, but there is yet another growing danger over the horizon. Early into a Kerry administration, we could see a familiar sighta trans-Atlantic crisisexcept this time it wouldn't be over Iraq but Iran.

The threat to America from Iraqi weapons of mass destruction, if they ever existed, is in the past. Iran, on the other hand, is the problem of the future. Over the last two years, thanks to tips from Iranian opposition groups and investigations by the International Atomic Energy Agency, it has become clear that Iran is seeking to develop nuclear weapons. In the words of the agency, Iran has "a practically complete front end of a nuclear fuel cycle," which leads most experts to believe it is two to three years away from having a nuclear bomb.

European countries were as worried by this development as Washington, and since the United States has no relations with Iran, Europe stepped in last fall and negotiated a deal with Iran. It was an excellent agreement in which Iran pledged to stop developing fissile

material (the core ingredient of a nuclear bomb) and to keep its nuclear programme transparent. The only problem is, Iran has recently announced that it isn't going to abide by the deal. As the IAEA's investigation got more serious, Tehran got more secretive. One month ago the agency condemned Iran for its failure to cooperate. Tehran responded by announcing that it would resume work in prohibited areas.

That's where things stand now, with

exchange with Israel. If Iran's programme went forward, at some point Israel would almost certainly try to destroy it using airstrikes, as it did Iraq's reactor in Osirik. Such an action would, of course, create a massive political crisis in the region.

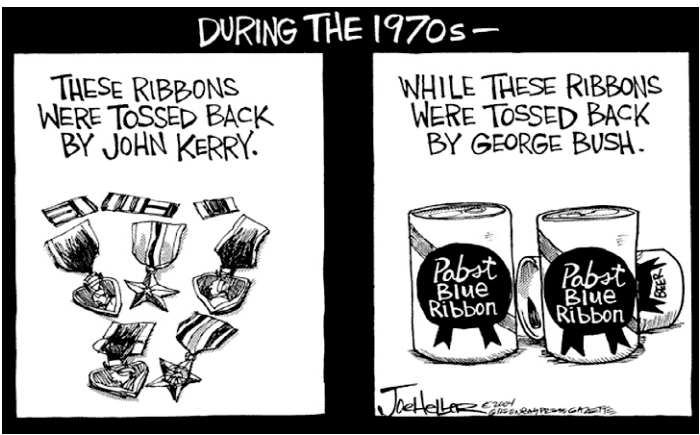
In the face of these stark dangers, Europe seems remarkably passive. Having burst into action last fall, it does not seem to know what to do now that Iran has rebuffed its efforts. It is urging negotiations again, which is fine. But

production of a nuclear bomb, Europeans were unwilling to take any robust measures like the use of force or tough sanctions. James Steinberg, a senior Clinton official who organized this workshop, said that he was "deeply frustrated by European attitudes." Madeleine Albright, who regularly convenes a discussion group of former foreign ministers, said that on this topic, "Europeans say they understand the threat but then act as if the real problem is not Iran but the United States."

American policy toward Iran is hardly blameless. Washington refuses even to consider the possibility of direct talks with Iran, let alone actual relations. Europeans could present Washington with a plan. They would go along with a bigger stick if Washington would throw in a bigger carrot: direct engagement with Tehran. This is something Tehran has long sought, and it could be offered in return for renouncing its nuclear ambitions.

But for any of this to happen, Europe must be willing to play an active, assertive role. It must stop viewing itself merely as a critic of American policy, but rather see itself as a partner, jointly acting to reduce the dangers of nuclear proliferation. And it should do this not as a favour to John Kerry but as a responsibility to its own citizens and those of the world.

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Indo-Pak rapprochement and beyond

TARIQ ALI

WE have been observing with great interest that the two intractable adversaries of the subcontinent are talking about burying their hatchets. Talks are on between India and Pakistan, whose rivalries have attained mythological proportions and pale that existed between the French and the Germans for centuries. The talks feature a number of issues, some substantial and others confidence-building. The difference between the talks now and the many failed dialogues before is that this time, they are talking, not just to go through the motions, but to actually achieve results. The reasons for this sea-change in attitudes are many, not the least important of which is that the current world situation has made it a historical necessity.

The Hindu-Muslim mistrust, which has been the root-cause of this hostility, was in a large measure spawned under the aegis of the British around the beginning of the 20th century. Their intentions then, were by no means to create a separate state for the Muslim community, but to use the rivalries and angers that existed between the two communities as a convenient wedge to perpetuate their hold over the Indian empire. It is not that the Muslim mistrust was totally unfounded. Many Congress members themselves have admitted that although the Congress claimed to represent the common interests of the two communities, partition became inevitable because of the extreme myopia with which the Congress had dealt with some legitimate and other not-so-legitimate safeguards that the Muslims had demanded. It is also a twist of history that had the Second World War, which broke out in 1938, not disrupted the process of gradually granting Indians some form of home rule, leading progressively to independence, the

embryonic idea of Pakistan may not have been able to evolve into a full-blown demand. Pakistan, after its creation also forgot to roll back the aggressive slogans it had used during its creation. On the contrary, the palace intrigues of its civil and military bureaucracy was able to convince its rulers that a *larke-lengey* posture would serve them best.

However, the ramifications of the global power equations in the aftermath of 9/11 are that all that saber rattling must change. And it is these new compulsions that may spark a breakthrough in the peace process between the two countries, ushering in new hopes for a peaceful and progressive South Asia. However, for those enamoured with the two nation theory, the peace process will spell disappointment because it

been regressing. Therefore, in the changed circumstances of today, the Islamic world has little option but to accept the paradigm changes that have occurred and march in-step with the rest of the world.

Although it is true that the west (in the context of this article) represented by the U.S. had no compunction in fanning the terrorist message of fundamentalism and Talibanism in their bid to dismember the "evil empire", they are in no mood today of tolerating another challenge to the supremacy which they have built over the last 600 years. And unsavoury, but true remains the fact that they will be able to find many willing co-operators in their bid to chastise what they view as the *enfant terrible* of the world today -- the Islamic world. No matter how loyally the Arab Sheikhs may have served the

tion of its own, in the next. Terror has been and is used by the west too, not only in the Abu Ghraieb prisons, but in their own lands all the time, but their societies and systems are such that these acts do not go absolutely scot-free as has been the case in the Arab lands. However, the good news is that this paradigm change that the Islamic world must go through is not as soul-wrenching as it sounds. We must not forget that Islam was able to evolve from its humble beginnings as a tribal religion into an international credo within a century of its founding because it was able to adapt itself to the various local environments.

South Asia is advantageously poised to play a pivotal role in the transformation that Islam must undergo--not in its basics, I hasten to add, but in its applications. South

Bangladesh is cheap!

DR. FAKHRUDDIN AHMED

DURING the writer's just concluded five-week sojourn in Bangladesh this July-August, once again the writer was reminded of how inexpensive most things are in Bangladesh compared to America. At several traffic lights at Dhaka, for instance, the writer was accosted with hawkers shoving pirated copies Bill Clinton's autobiography in the writer's face for less than Taka 200, approximately one tenth of what it costs here. Out of journalistic curiosity I asked a hawkter to name the book. "My Life," he answered, and I am sure if I had queried him further he would have added, "Monicar Kotha Aache, Sir!"

Transportation is the cheapest. We traveled from the Sonargaon hotel to Dhanmandi in a taxi for Taka 27 (less than one half of a dollar) and from the Dhaka University campus to Mohammadpur for only 60 Taka (one dollar) tips included! Restaurants are equally cheap. Ten of us dined in an excellent Chinese restaurant in Gulshan for only Taka equivalent of fifty dollars (5 dollars per person), which stunned my elder son traveling with me! Hotel and restaurant prices are more western like in Dhaka's top two international 5-star hotels, Sonargaon and Sheraton.

As I was to appear in Bangladesh Television's (BTV) current affairs programme "Laal Golap" (due to be telecast at 10:30 P.M. after the English news on Friday, August 13), I needed shirts and pants. I was advised to visit "Big Boss" in Dhanmandi. I purchased a couple of brand name shirts and a couple of Dockers trousers for 5-6 dollars each. In the US they would have cost at least five times as much. I also needed sweat shirts and pants. For that I visited "Banga Bazaar" near Dhaka University's Fazlul Huq Hall. A Reebok sweat shirt and pant cost only Taka 425, or about seven dollars. In the US it would have cost seven times as much. Cheap to the chagrin of my

relatives, I did not bargain, because I thought the prices were low enough for me already!

Bangladeshis have a way with words. We cut our hair at a barber shop named "Hairotics" for only Taka 50 (less than a dollar), including a head massage! In the US a haircut costs at least 15 to 20 dollars. Delighted, we gave the barber an equal amount in tips which he accepted without betraying his surprise and gratitude. Armed with the mighty dollar one can be very

ished, to frequent places where infected humans may be roaming. Even while going for the Juma prayers, we were advised to spray our uncovered skin with mosquito spray, plenty of which we had purchased in the US in anticipation of our trip.

Ordinarily a mild mannered man, I was amazed to see my transformation into an animal with killer instincts as soon as I detected the buzz of a mosquito anywhere within the vicinity of where I was. With the eyes and hands

to the untiring efforts of Bangladesh's most famous archeologist, Dr. Nazimuddin Ahmed, between 1975 and 1980 the Lalbagh Fort was renovated and restored. In his booklet, "Mughal Dhaka and Lalbagh Fort," available at the Lalbagh Fort, Dr. Nazimuddin Ahmed describes the finest surviving specimen of Mughal Dhaka, Lalbagh Fort, (originally named Aurangabad Fort in honour of the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb) as follows: "Rectangular in plan, it encloses an area of 1082 feet by 700 feet and in addition to its two gracefully lofty gateways on south-east and north-east corners and a subsidiary small unpretentious gateway on north, it also includes within its fortified parameter a number of elegant monuments surrounded by attractive gardens. These are: a small 3-domed mosque on west, the striking mausoleum of Bibi Pari, the reputed daughter of Nawab Shaista Khan and the Audience Hall with "hammam" of the governor to the east of the precinct. The main purpose of this fort, it seems was to provide a defensive enclosure of the palatial edifices of the interior and as such, was a type of palace-fortress rather than a siege fort." The Lalbagh Fort is currently the largest open space in old Dhaka. As we were fortunate enough to tour the fort with Dr. Nazimuddin Ahmed himself, it was gratifying to see thousands of Bangladeshis taking a lesson in their cultural heritage at the theme-park setting of the Lalbagh Fort at a very nominal entrance fee of Taka 2.

We were also fortunate enough to tour the Ahsan Manzil by the river Buriganga in the company of Dr. Nazimuddin Ahmed. Ahsan Manzil is the residence-office complex of Dhaka's Nawab family. This is where Nawab Salimullah hosted the likes of Lord Curzon (after whom Dhaka University's science complex "Curzon Hall" is named), and such meetings had a lot to do with the establishment of Dhaka University, East Pakistan, and finally Bangladesh.

Ahsan Manzil has been restored due to the foresight of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the acquiring of the property during General Ershad's time and renovation work under the guidance of Dr. Enamul Haque. Ahsan Manzil too is the largest open space around the river Buriganga. The admission fee is Taka 2, and once again it was wonderful to see thousands of Bangladeshis visiting one of their most famous historic sites. It has been a long time since I stayed for full five weeks in Bangladesh. All other recent visits have been much shorter and during winter. As I went around Dhaka and visited our ancestral home near Feni, I felt an intense sense of kinship with everyone. I genuinely sensed that the street urchin, the rickshawala, the men in fancy cars and the pretty girls in the shopping malls were a part of who I am. And I felt pretty good about

of a serial killer, I would relentlessly pursue the fast moving insect until I put an end to it. My relatives would then examine the squashed remains of the dead insect to see its parting gift to us - stripes (Dengu possibility) or no stripes (only malaria possibility)! Those who contracted Dengu could never recollect the moment they were bitten, I was told. As the Dengu incubation period is between 7 to 10 days, we are definitely not out of the woods yet.

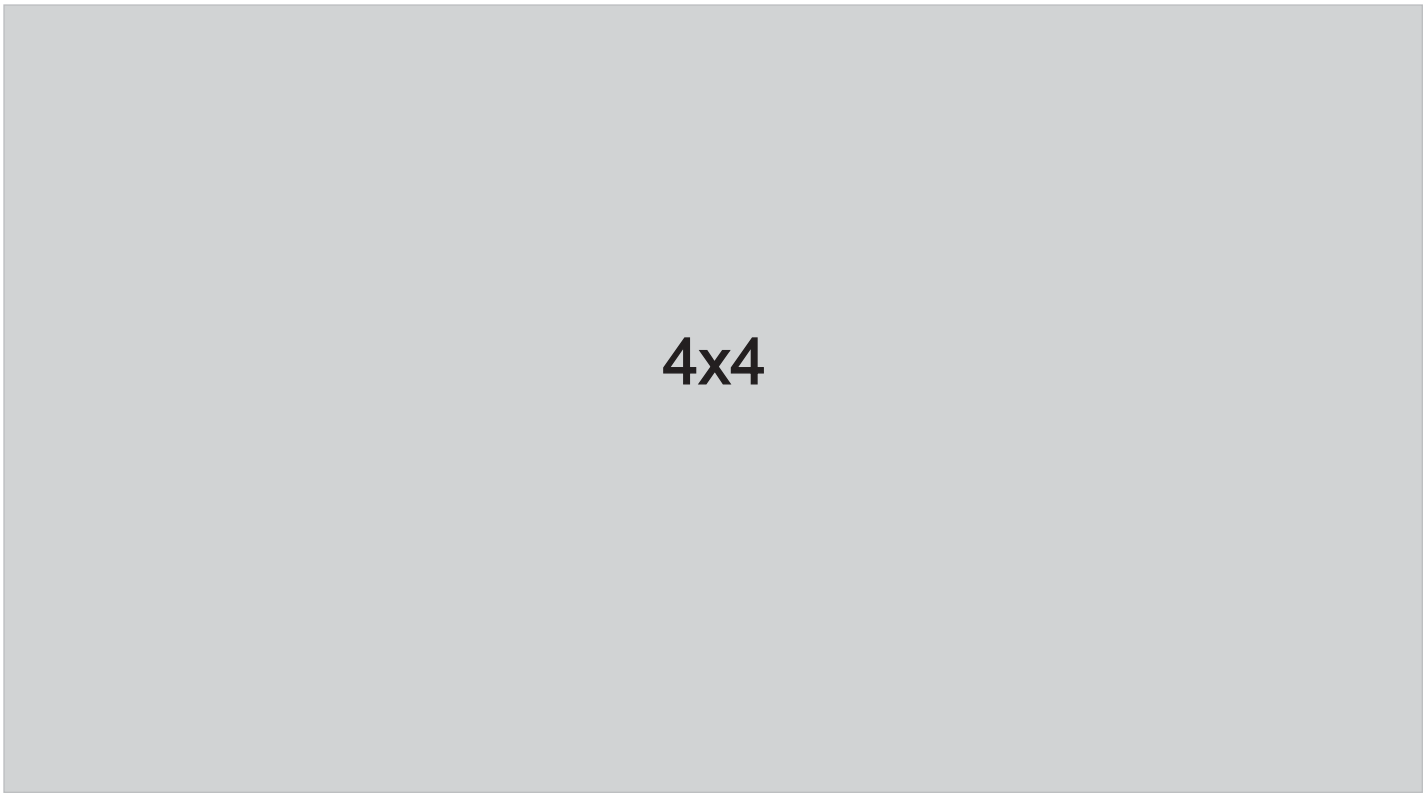
We found ourselves in the middle of the Dengu season. Our planned trip to Chittagong and Cox's Bazaar had to be canceled because of the Dengu epidemic. I learned so much about Dengu this time. In the mosquito world they must be buzzing their wings off laughing about how petrified the humans are of them! My relatives were horrified to learn that I had taken a walk along the Dhanmandi Lake one day before dusk with a friend along with thousands of others. Mosquitoes do not generate Dengu, I was reminded, they carry the virus from one infected human to another. As such, it is a folly, I was mildly admon-

Hindu or the Muslim genre, has banished that syncretistic tradition into a distant dream, found only in Hindi film songs of yesteryears.

Pakistan will initially go through an intensely traumatic period in its transition to a reduced belligerency, and they must keep a sharp eye that this genie within its body politic is not allowed to come out. The beginnings of that trauma are already evident, as they start to deny safe havens to the Taliban and the Kashmiri insurgents and significantly, in the way that a component of their present government, the MMA is beginning to be harassed by their own establishment. It is in the interest of the Islamic world that Pakistan survives through these traumas. Both the countries will benefit immensely from scaling down on the weaponry and the size of their armies, but more than the economic benefits, a reduced army would deliver Pakistan from the curse of a government within the government which has dictated state policy and which has been the source of all their misadventures of the past. The world is entering a phase where the famous words, "it's the economy, stupid" are beginning to impact many nations including China and India and who knows what may burst forth as new interpretations to the concepts of statehood are explored -- it may be an interesting world indeed.

Reduction of hostilities will enable Pakistan to direct its energies for competing with India on the international business front. In fact, it may create the foundations for the Muslims of the South Asia to take a leadership role in the Islamic world. It will also enable Pakistan to take advantage of the industrial and scientific resources that India has acquired. Most of all, it will permit Pakistan to proudly claim as theirs once again all the things it had to leave behind in 1947-- its common history and its common cultural traditions. They will no longer have to bemoan their severance from the red stones of the Lal Qilah or the serenity of the Tajmahal. Above all, it will give the millions of people who were wrenched from their homes in search of the promised land in 1947, new hopes, if not of going back but of a final destination.

It will also let the third country of the sub-continent, Bangladesh, take steps which are in the best interests of its economy, its people and its politics and which are driven by pragmatism, not dogma. It will strengthen Bangladesh's voice in South Asia and its collective voice will then be more than just a whimper in the world stage. It will of course, strengthen the democratic institutions in the country and help to reduce the frills in our defence spending, because, after all, who are we fighting against? It will possibly open up employment opportunities for its population in the other two countries. Reduction of religious tensions in India and Pakistan will perhaps finally give a voice to the minority population in our country, who have had to lead a life of denigration ever since 1971 and who--let us have the courage to admit--we have denied equal opportunities as citizens of this country.



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