

Writing prose for a new term End of the Arafat Era



FAREED ZAKARIA writes from Washington

Most second-term administrations have different faces in top positions. But most also tend to be less bold and assertive in their second incarnation. In this case, it may be a blessing.

The question for many is, how different will this Bush term be from his first? My own sense is that it will be different, but not for the right reasons. The second term of the Bush administration will be less aggressive, less unilateral, less militant and less arrogant in its

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foreign policy. However, this will not be due to a change of heart, but because the administration will be hemmed in. America is now constrained by the world, a situation largely created by George Bush's policies. Unilateralism, military force and arrogance simply won't work.

If you want to see what Bush 2 would look like, look around it's already happening. On North Korea, Iran and many other issues, the Bush administration is working with allies, using international institutions, preferring diplomacy to force and being patient. Sometimes too patient. The irony and tragedy of Bush's second term might well be that even if force or the threat of force were necessary to deal with North Korea and Iran, for instance George Bush would be a paper tiger. He would not be able to garner the minimal support or

legitimacy to make good on his threats. Any attempt at another major military strike, and the United States would truly have to go it alone perhaps without the backing even of Britain.

It's not that Bush has had an epiphany. Colin Powell has not suddenly convinced Bush that he's right. The neoconservatives have not suddenly relented. Tony Blair will not magically find that he is now truly influential at the White House. George Bush still believes that military force, moral clarity and certitude are the one true path.

But what this means is that we will see only the rhetoric of confrontation and the reality of accommodation. Bush will talk about not tolerating North Korea's nuclear bombs, but he will tolerate them. He will insist that Iran will not be "allowed" to go nuclear, but he will allow it. This will make for a hollow foreign policy.

It's a cliché, but it's true: Bush needs to govern from the center. In foreign policy as everywhere else, Bush governed for his base in his first term. His idea of bipartisanship was Norman Mineta as secretary of transportation. One of Bush's cardinal errors in foreign policy was his administration's ABC rule: Anything But Clinton. On North Korea, Powell tried to continue the Clinton policy and was publicly repudiated by Bush. On other issues, China, Iran, the reversal was less public but no less certain. And yet in many of these cases, the Bush administration after months and sometimes years of attempting alternatives has ended up pretty much adopting the Clinton policy.

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PRAFUL BIDWAI writes from New Delhi

IT'S tragic that Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat's grave health crisis should coincide with Israel's stepped-up offensive in Gaza, killing 138 Palestinians, and parliamentary approval of a super-controversial plan for "withdrawal" from the Strip.

Mr Arafat (75) has reportedly slipped into a coma. One hopes he survives. He has bounced back whenever he was written off -- right since 1982, when the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) was forced to quit Lebanon.

Contrary to propaganda, Mr Arafat was never an obstacle to peace, but a precondition for it. The Palestinians have rallied behind him because he put their cause on the world map through his unparalleled past contribution.

Whatever happens to Mr Arafat, the Palestinian people must reconcile themselves to a transition to new leadership. This may not be smooth, given differences between Prime Minister Ahmed Qurei, PLO secretary-general Mahmoud Abbas (imposed by the US upon the PA as PM last year), former interior minister Mohammed Dahlan, and the charismatic Left-winger Marwan Barghouti (now an Israeli prisoner).

The US and Israel will also cynically try to exploit the PLO's internal differences to prop up a pliant leader.

To resist this, the PLO must forge a strong collective leadership. Truly testing times lie ahead for the Palestinians. They have suffered grievously since the expulsion of 800,000 people from their land in 1948.

The immediate challenge comes from Mr Ariel Sharon's plan to "withdraw" from all the 21 settlements in Gaza and four in the West Bank.

The plan is part of Israel's comprehensive strategy to continue its occupation under more favourable conditions while freezing the peace process. As Mr Sharon's senior adviser Dov Weisglass says: "When you freeze the peace process, you prevent the establishment of a Palestinian state."

The strategy aims to expand and secure Israel's West Bank settlements.

impossible. The strategy is being implemented through numerous measures:

- Confining Palestinians to small pockets (Area 'A' defined by the Oslo accords to be under the PA's full control, and Area 'B' under "joint" Palestinian-Israeli security), but excluding them from Palestine's Israeli-controlled 'C' Area.
• Obstructing the Palestinians' movements within Areas 'A' and 'B' through checkpoints, barriers, roadblocks, etc.

policy of impoverishing the Palestinian people, the experience of colonialism looks like a picnic. The British exploited Indians through loot, despotic rule, and destruction of institutions. But they didn't occupy their fields or steal most of their water.

By contrast, Israel has confiscated 24 percent of the West Bank and Gaza and 89 percent of East Jerusalem for settlements, highways, military installations, etc. It controls 80 percent of the occupied territories' water resources.

These settlements are totally illegal. Upholding them legitimises annexation of territory. No major power justified Hitler's annexation of Czechoslovakia. But the US has just done that for Israel!

The Palestine situation has turned critical. The Intifadah has temporarily stalled, and jihadi groups have been weakened. The PA's credibility has suffered because of the popular view that its leadership has turned "soft" and corrupt.

According to the International Monetary Fund, PA officials diverted as much as \$900 million to overseas accounts between 1997 and 2003. A Palestinian Legislative Council committee found that nearly half of the PA's \$326 million 1997 budget was lost through corruption or mismanagement.

Central to this network are "moderate" (read, pliant) leaders whom Israel and the US favour.

Yet, the Palestinian people's will hasn't been broken. They today face an imminent threat: their land being broken up into scores of Bantustans with no contiguous territory and without sovereign control over borders.

What the Palestinians need most today is leadership. At stake is world peace.

The festering Palestine crisis is one of the greatest sources of resentment fueling popular discontent as well as jihadi intransigence. For millions of people, it's the touchstone of whether justice is possible within today's global order.

Without a Palestine solution, there will be neither justice nor peace in the world. We all have a stake in a democratic, secular, free Palestine.

Praful Bidwai is an eminent Indian columnist.

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Mr Sharon is explicit: "withdrawal" will "severely harm Palestinians" and end "the dream of a Palestinian state."

After "withdrawal," Israel will continue to exercise full control over Gaza's air, sea, and land approaches. Israel will take "pre-emptive and reactive steps to use force against threats posed from within." This is in keeping with Mr Sharon's "historic goal" of destroying the PLO.

After "withdrawal," Gaza will become a giant prison. "Withdrawal" won't change Gaza's status as an occupied territory under international law. An official Israeli study admits as much.

No wonder most Palestinians call the withdrawal "reoccupation."

Through it, Mr Sharon wants to bypass any political process and make a genuine two-state solution near-

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Imposing tight work and residence permits, like South Africa's infamous "Pass Laws."

Erecting a 700 km-long "Separation Barrier" (almost five times longer than the Berlin Wall). This has been declared illegal by the International Court of Justice.

This situation, I found during a recent visit, represents apartheid in practice. Compared to the brutal occupation, the Israeli military's intrusion into daily life, and Israel's

Israel's post-September 2000 military campaigns have killed over 3,000 people, including 500 children. The UN Conference on Trade & Development estimates that closures and losses from military operations have drained \$2.4 billion out of the Palestinian economy.

Israel uses house demolitions as instruments of terror and impoverishment -- to turn the Palestinians into illegal residents in their own homeland!

In all this, Israel has enjoyed the tacit support of the US. Six months ago, this support became explicit, with a Sharon-Bush declaration. This cancelled the Palestinian refugees' right of return -- a fundamental right under international law. It also upheld Israel's stand that it's "unrealistic" to expect it to vacate all the settlements, which house 420,000 people.

Biotechnology for Bangladesh

ZERA I. SERAJ

MOST critiques of biotechnology seem to think that it is a Frankenstein that will take over all the agricultural research of the country (Daily Star, November 1, The Biotechnology Trap, by Nazrul Islam).

On the contrary, if used within the context of national needs, it can be used to increase crop productivity in our country.

First of all, biotechnology does not simply mean genetically modified crops or organisms. It can be used to speed up current breeding practices, as a tool for disease diagnostics, as well as to catalogue the rich biological diversity of our plant species.

Secondly, all biotechnology is not what we can import from abroad. Scientists in our country are doing biotechnological research to improve our local crops.

Thirdly, by agreeing to consider the fact that biotechnological research can benefit our agricultural sector, the

government has opened the door to the legislature, which can prevent multinationals from exporting GMOs to Bangladesh, unless the policy-makers approve of it.

I would like to clear the mind of the general reader about certain misconceptions generated by The Biotechnology Trap.

First of all, farmers can make their own hybrid seeds if trained to do so. BRRI has produced its first hybrid rice, which has gained popularity with farmers in Jessore and some farmers have already been trained to produce their own seed. It just needs an extra step of having to produce the parent seeds first from which hybrid seeds will be derived, every time. Due to its genetic makeup, hybrid seeds have to be produced from specific parents because only the hybrids (and not their parents or progeny) have high yields.

As pointed out by the author, a lot of biotechnology is private, but a lot of research is being carried out by public research institutes as well. Golden Rice

is one example and then we have Bt rice as well as bacterial blight and fungus resistant rice, produced at IRR.

Yes, in the West, the main focus is on pesticide resistant varieties -- that is because they do not need disease resistant or drought tolerant crops. We need to do this research ourselves.

Agriculture has become commercial, just as everything else has in the 21st century. This is a sign of the times and not really to do with the Green Revolution. Potato crackers are available even in the tiniest village shops. It is however not true that seeds from GM crops cannot be saved. These are like any other seeds.

Yes, if the seeds are bought from a multinational company, they may ask royalty every time these seeds are planted. However, it is unlikely that foreign GM seeds will do well in our environment. If these seeds have qualities that we need, like say drought resistance, these will have to be introduced into farmer popular varieties of our country. So the government can enter into a farmer-

friendly deal, if the quality of the crop is beneficial to our needs.

The adverse affect of GM food reported by Mr Islam's article is very specific and that of one type of Bt corn to which only one out of a million people were found allergic to. This product was later taken off the market. Most GM foods have to be tested under stringent criteria and are only released after safety is assured. This is unlike the scenario where our farmers spray insecticide to the eggplant crop once a day, which surely becomes toxic and we eat it without question.

Yes, some herbicide resistant crops may become weeds, but this is only true for crops, which are cross-pollinated. Most cereal crops are self-pollinated. Then again, Bangladesh does not need herbicide tolerant crops. It needs disease resistant and drought, flood and salt resistant crops. We should aim to take what we need and after determining whether it will make a much-needed impact on increasing our productivity.

As for Bt cotton in India, the full picture of the results of such plantation is not complete yet. Some farmers have reported good yields, while others have not. Since it is the same seed, other environmental factors are probably at play here and one cannot claim that Bt cotton has been a disaster in India. As with any technology, its proper use in a planned manner can yield benefits, while improper use can harm the public. If we can produce a flood tolerant rice variety, no writing in newspapers will prevent farmers from using such a crop in flood-prone areas, because that is his livelihood. Research has progressed to a stage, where such a crop could be produced very soon. Neither the West, nor any multinational is interested in such a crop, but a farmer would be instead of being critical, let us encourage the government to fund research that would actually produce such a crop within our country for the benefit of our farmers.

Zera I. Sera is a Professor, Department of Biochemistry & Molecular Biology, Dhaka University.

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In the Supreme Court of Bangladesh, High Court Division (Statutory Original Jurisdiction) Matter No. 129 of 2004 In the matter of: An application under Section 151 of the Companies Act, 1994 And in the Matter of: National Bank Limited Versus The Registrar, Joint Stock Companies Notice is hereby given that the aforesaid petitioner has filed an application under section 151 of the Companies Act, 1994 before the Hon'ble High Court Division of the Supreme Court of Bangladesh for condonation of delay in filing its Return of Allotment of 1,39,000 shares allotted on 13.12.83. Upon hearing, the Hon'ble Court was pleased to admit the application on 01.11.2004 and fixed the matter on 04.12.2004 for hearing. Any one interested to oppose the said application may appear before the Court personally or through a duly authorised Advocate on the date fixed for hearing. Copy of the application may be obtained from the undersigned upon payment of prescribed fees. Morshed Ahmed Khan Advocate, Supreme Court of Bangladesh For: Lee, Khan & Partners Suite # 5/8, City Heart (4th Floor), 67 Naya Paltan, Dhaka 1000

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