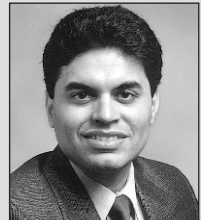


# We might 'win' but still lose



**FAREED ZAKARIA**  
writes from Washington

EVERYONE seems quite certain that George W. Bush's new plan for Iraq is bound to fail. But I'm not so sure. At a military level, the strategy could well produce some successes.

American forces have won every battle they have fought in Iraq. Having more troops, and a new mission to secure whole neighbourhoods is a good idea -- better four years late than never. But the crucial question is, will military progress lead to political progress?

That logic, at the heart of the president's new strategy, strikes me as being highly dubious.

Administration officials have pointed to last week's fighting against Sunni insurgents in and around Baghdad's Haifa Street as a textbook example of the new strategy. Iraqi forces took the lead, American troops backed them up, and the government did not put up any obstacles.

The Wall Street Journal's Daniel Henninger concluded that the battle "looked like a successful test of unified (American-Iraqi) effort."

But did it? Newsweek's Michael

The greatest danger of Bush's new strategy, then, isn't that it won't work but that it will -- and thereby push the country one step further along the road to all-out civil war. Only a sustained strategy of pressure on the Maliki government -- unlike anything Bush has been willing to do yet -- has any chance of averting this outcome.

Hastings, embedded with an American advisory team that took part in the fighting, reports that no more than 24 hours after the battle began on January 6, the brigade's Sunni commander, Gen. Razzak Hamza, was relieved of his command.

The phone call to fire him came directly from the office of Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki, a Shiite. Lt. Col. Steven Duke, commander of a US advisory team working with the Iraqis, and a 20-year Army veteran, describes Hamza as "a true patriot (who) would go after the bad guys on either side." Hamza was replaced by a Shiite.

Joint operations against Shiite militias are far less likely, and not only because of political interference from the top. Groups like Moqtada al-Sadr's Mahdi Army don't generally start fire-fights with the Americans or attack Iraqi forces.

Their goals are different, quieter. Another U.S. adviser, Maj. Mark Brady, confirms reports that the Mahdi Army has been continuing to systematically take over Sunni neighborhoods, killing, terrorizing and forcing people out of their homes.

"They're slowly moving across the river," he told Hastings, from

predominantly Shiite eastern Baghdad into the predominantly Sunni west. If the 20,000 additional American troops being sent to the Iraqi capital focus primarily on Sunni insurgents, there's a chance that the Shiite militias might get bolder. Colonel Duke puts it bluntly: "[The Mahdi Army] is sitting on the 50-year line eating popcorn, watching us do their work for them."

So what will happen if Bush's new plan "succeeds" militarily over the next six months? Sunnis will become more insecure as their militias get dismantled. Shiite militias will lower their profile on the streets and remain as they are now, ensconced within the Iraqi army and police.

That will surely make Sunnis less likely to support the new Iraq. Shiite political leaders, on the other hand, will be emboldened. They refused to make any compromises -- on federalism, de-Baathification, oil revenues and jobs -- in 2003 when the United States was dominant, in 2005 when the insurgency was raging, and in 2006 when they took over the reins of government fully. Why would they do so as they gain the upper hand militarily?

Administration officials claim that this time things are different. The Maliki government, and the

Shiite leadership more generally, understand that they must crack down on militias and compromise with the Sunnis.

Why? In the words of one senior US official -- under instructions to stay anonymous -- because Shiite political leaders understand that they no longer have "unquestioning American support anymore, especially from Capitol Hill."

This suggests that the administration finally understands that Bush's blank-check policy for the Iraqi government has proved totally counterproductive. The one action that might be forcing the Iraqi leadership to make some compromises has been the threat that Congress would force a withdrawal of American support.

One month ago, the White House was criticizing Congress as being borderline treasonous for suggesting such a thing. Today, its strategy in Iraq rests on the fruits of that assertiveness.

Over the past three and a half years, the dominant flaw in the Bush administration's handling of Iraq is that it has, both intentionally and inadvertently, driven the country's several communities apart.

Every seemingly neutral action -- holding elections, firing Baathists from the bureaucracy, building up



an Iraqi military and police force -- has had seismic sectarian consequences. The greatest danger of Bush's new strategy, then, isn't that it won't work but that it will -- and thereby push the country one step further along the road to all-out civil war.

Only a sustained strategy of pressure on the Maliki government -- unlike anything Bush has been willing to do yet -- has any chance of averting this outcome.

Otherwise, American interests and ideals will both be in jeopardy. Al Qaeda in Iraq -- the one true

national-security threat we face from that country -- will gain Sunni support.

In addition, as American officers like Duke and Brady have noted, our ideals will be tarnished. The US army will be actively aiding and assisting in the largest program of

ethnic cleansing since Bosnia. Is that the model Bush wanted for the Middle East?

Fareed Zakaria is Editor of Newsweek International. (C) Newsweek International. Reprinted by arrangement.

# Voter ID card: An incremental approach

One might raise a valid question about the ultimate returns from such an attempt compared to the cost and the possibility of a looming failure considering the tight schedule. The answer to that question lies in the continuity, the way we can continue to multiply the benefits. If whatever is done is continued by the next administration, we are not losing anything.

MOHAMMAD IRFAN

THE possibility of using voter ID cards in the upcoming election is being discussed heavily. The whole thing definitely involves detailed planning and committed work from an efficient team with dynamic leadership.

Various issues in this connection are already being raised from several corners. I have identified two key debates. One around the required and available time-frame to do this, and the other on the volume and affordability of the expertise and efforts needed to take up such a job.

A third area, not so visible in the discussion, is the need for a well-coordinated team, committed to work under the prevailing circumstances and limitations. I would like to touch these issues from a broad incremental approach with possi-

ble examples, as fit or required.

On the time-frame, two things are important. First we need to get a ballpark estimate of the total time required to gather necessary data with a workable degree of precision, prepare the identification cards with reasonable quality, and to distribute them to the voters or within their convenience.

Once we know that, we can see whether that time is enough or we need to stretch the election within tolerable horizons. It is difficult and somewhat resource intensive to answer the first question.

For the second question, an analysis of the current political situation and the events leading to it, points us to a trade-off between fairness and timeliness, with a feedback within themselves.

To circumvent these first stumbling steps, a graduated approach might be taken. What is needed

immediately is an acceptable time-frame for holding the election, negotiated among the relevant parties.

Side by side, the voter ID project might start rolling by setting up a plans with graded priorities, each with their own high and low expectation bars. Various scenarios of problems and challenges with planned ahead contingencies have to be packaged in a set of plans around the major one.

If there is a broad-based transparency in setting and monitoring of these goals, I am positive, any well-fought adversity would be worked around with active participation from motivated voters themselves.

From the logistics standpoint, it is no doubt a humongous task even to think about preparing ninety million or so voter identification cards in a time-frame of a mere few

months. We need to hunt and assemble the right experts, assuming we have enough of them.

We need supplies, a big part of which we might need to procure from outside the country and fly or ship them in. Above all, we need to connect the experts, their logistics and the clients, a task which our geography and climate make difficult, especially in remote areas.

Can we do it, if yes how soon and with what resources? Again, it is difficult to answer this question without going to the drawing board. But it would help to do one step at a time in this area as well. First I would like to head to the need for resorting to simplicity.

Simplicity in the solution adds to flexibility in the long run. Simplicity in the user interface enhances productivity. One difficult task is to combine the two into a good user interface with a high degree of inter-operability.

With a pressed schedule like this one, a componential rather than an integrated approach might work better. One of the important issues relating to this project is the storage and backup of digital data, for which the first requirement is the adoption of a standard format. This has to be a format with easy

manipulation, low footprint and maximum portability. We have seen the example of a simple pixel/picture size jpeg standard set up by the US immigration department and used by people around the world, including the remote villages of Bangladesh, to upload data to the US government servers at no cost to the government.

The most important thing in such a high priority high profile project, many would agree, is a very good team. The reason I have taken the natural first step of team building as the last issue for discussion, is to be able to appreciate the requirements for such a team.

On the face, it might look like the most difficult task for such a huge project is to find enough micro-managers. But equally important is a smaller group of people working with the big picture in their mind.

Two criteria are usually followed in our country in selecting project leaders; either high profile experts or high-ranking generalists are picked. Without raising any serious question on the efficacy of such choices, I would like to point to the special issues of management in this particular project.

This project is being perceived by the nation as important and, to

some extent immediate. Naturally there will be lot of pressure both from stakeholders and watchdogs. The big project with a shrunk timeline would demand a higher level of physical and mental involvement from the leaders.

Above all, the functionality between technical and administrative issues has to be merged with enough arts and skills. It is important for people on both sides of the spectrum to understand, appreciate and resolve each other's issues. Whether this will happen at the micro-level will depend many a ways on the leadership at various levels.

Whether this will happen in core, in turn, will depend on the existence and appreciation of such qualities in people from both sides. Shunning the usual practice of picking a single project leader, we can choose a core team with the necessary combination, a team that can add to their productivity by triangulating on each other's expertise.

There is a risk of such a team looking for skirmishes rather than skills, but some of those could be pre-empted by a sufficiently well devised project charter read with well-intentioned people.

Despite the overall enthusiasm and support from our development partners, there are statutory requirements and field realities that the project has to be coordinated by a public agency.

While there are some concerns about the expertise, efficiency and exposure of our public sector officials, I believe that quality issues could be a problem both in public and private sectors. The standard solution to that is a rightly priced incentive mechanism guarded by accountability.

Two other major limitations are identified within the public sector. One is acquired, a hierarchical rather than a lateral management style in the public offices and the disabling environment arising out of that.

The other is the inherent bureaucratic struggle between different agencies initiated, initiated many a times with well-intentioned groups having competing priorities and understandings. While it is not practically possible to overcome these, the hierarchies could be minimized and the trade-offs could be turned into synergies with a co-ordinated planning.

To give a specific example, field workers might be allowed multiple

reporting points even at the same level of hierarchy. This will serve two purposes; information flow won't have to stop for the absence of any single node.

At the same time, multiple back-up points for data storage and cross-validation will be established at lower additional costs. Added with a dynamic oversight and re-delegation as required, this structure can work as a contingency planning as well.

One might raise a valid question about the ultimate returns from such an attempt compared to the cost and the possibility of a looming failure considering the tight schedule. The answer to that question lies in the continuity, the way we can continue to multiply the benefits. If whatever is done is continued by the next administration, we are not losing anything.

Should we do it? I think we have to start it, we have to have enough Plan Bs, and we have to have realistic expectations.

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# Islamophobia in America

Ellison defeated two contenders in the Minnesota district of Minneapolis to become a member of the 435 seat House of Representatives, and made history as the first Muslim ever to be elected to the Congress. In response to Virgil Goode, Keith Ellison said, "there was nothing to fear. The fact that there are many different faiths, many different colours, and many different cultures in America is a great strength."

MOHAMMAD AMJAD HOSSAIN

ISLAM, and its role in politics, has been receiving attention in the opinion columns of many newspapers in America since the 9/11 attacks on America. But the recent comment by Keith Ellison, a Muslim from Minnesota who has been elected to the House of Representatives in November congressional elections, that he would take oath of office on the Quran has invited criticism from many, including Republican congressman from Virginia: Virgil Goode.

This is for the first time in America's history that a Muslim has been elected to the congress, but Muslims from Africa had come in the thousands to work as slaves in the early eighteenth century. Today, many Afro-American Muslims play an important role in the community. Muslims from the Middle East came to America during the nineteenth century. The twentieth century saw the arrival of several hundred thousand Muslims from Eastern Europe. The first Albanian mosque was opened in Maine in 1915. Somehow or other, American Muslim did not take part in politics. The population in the United

States is increasing every year because of the influx of foreign migrants. According to the Census Bureau, the population is expected to grow one percent in 2007. Therefore, the population will be around 200.8 million, of which the Muslim population will be about 7 million. The Muslim population is very little compared to other ethnic communities like Hispanic, for example. America has been a melting pot of foreign immigrants for many centuries. This country is multi-racial, embracing all faiths: Christian, Muslim, and Hindu, Jewish alike.

In the constitution, there is no discrimination against any religion. The first amendment in the constitution says that Congress shall make no law against establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof. The constitution says nothing about inaugural ceremonies, other than the words of the oath for the respective offices. No religious text is used during the swearing-in ceremony.

The statement in the press by Keith Ellison is uncalled for and which unnecessarily ignited controversy. Similarly, Congressman Virgil Goode has gone beyond his constitutional rights. In a letter to

constituent, Congressman Virgil Goode wrote, "the election of Ellison and other Muslims poses a danger to the country." Representative Goode is of the opinion that "the election of Muslims endangered the values and traditional US beliefs." Goode goes on to say that if American citizens do not wake up and adopt the Virgil Goode position on immigration, there will likely be many more Muslims elected to office and demanding the use of Quran in their swearing-in ceremony. Goode also advocated a total stopping of illegal immigration, and reducing the number of legal immigrants into the country.

Popular Radio Talk show anchor, Dennis Prager, also criticized the comments by a Muslim Democrat representative. Prager is of the opinion that "use of Quran would undermine American civilization, and make us more vulnerable to terrorism." Apart from the constitutional point, it would be relevant to know that Presidents Roosevelt, John Quincy Adams, and Lyndon B Johnson had been sworn in without bible.

Ellison defeated two contenders in the Minnesota district of Minneapolis to become a member

of the 435 seat House of Representatives, and made history as the first Muslim ever to be elected to the Congress. In response to Virgil Goode, Keith Ellison said, "there was nothing to fear. The fact that there are many different faiths, many different colours, and many different cultures in America is a great strength." Keith Ellison also spoke at the annual convention of two Muslim groups: the Muslim American Society and the Islamic Circle of North America in Michigan, where he emphasized on the faith in Allah and urged Muslims to face any challenge bravely and with patience.

In the inauguration ceremony of the members of the House of Representatives for 110th congress on January 4, Keith Ellison drew international attention by using Quran for taking an oath. The Quran that Keith used was owned by Thomas Jefferson, who was one of the founder fathers and the architect of the Constitution, and a towering figure in American democracy. Thomas Jefferson was the third president of America. Keith Ellison recited verses from Quran at a multi-faith prayer service conducted earlier which said: "Oh, humanity, we created you from a single pair, male and female, and made you tribes and nations so that you would know each other and not despise each other."

According to newspaper reports, the two volume Quran was printed in 1764, and is now held by the Library of Congress. Keith Ellison



used Quran during re-enactment of his swearing-in ceremony with Speaker Nancy Pelosi for a photo-op. Keith Ellison said that, from the earliest times of this Republic, the Quran was in the consciousness of people who brought about democracy. Keith Ellison traced back his American ancestry to 1741.

According to Reuter news agency, much of Jefferson's collec-

tion was destroyed when the British burned the capital during the war of 1812, but Quran incidentally survived. It is an irony that Virgil Goode, who opposed using Quran during the oath taking ceremony, represents the area where Thomas Jefferson was born and lived.

However, both Virgil Goode and Keith Ellison shook hands on the house floor, and Virgil congratulated Keith on his election. Keith also invited Virgil to have coffee



and discuss the controversial issue. As reported by the media, Virgil Goode would not change his stand. With some seven million Muslims in America, Islam is said to be fastest growing religion as a result of influx of immigrants, high birth rate and widespread conversion. After 9/11, American witnessed large segments of non-Muslims, particularly Hispanics who constitute 12.5 percent of the population, embrace Islam as their

faith. I was given to understand by some clerics that a large number of veteran warriors are embracing Islam in America. According to Muslim Educational and Cultural Council of America, an estimated seven thousand American soldiers from 1991 accepted Islam. The process of acceptance of Islam by non-Muslim American has begun, and it will continue.

Mohammad Amjad Hossain, former diplomat writes from Virginia.