

Bush: Facing failure in Iraq

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WHAT does Bush, the sole superpower's boss, do when failure in Iraq stares him starkly in the face?

Like leaders under stress, he dissembles and spins; offers crumbs of concession disguised as the fruits of partial "success"; and generally tries to present a brave front against impending disaster.

All these elements were present in Bush's nationwide TV address on Thursday 13 September on what he intends to do to extricate the US from the Iraq quagmire.

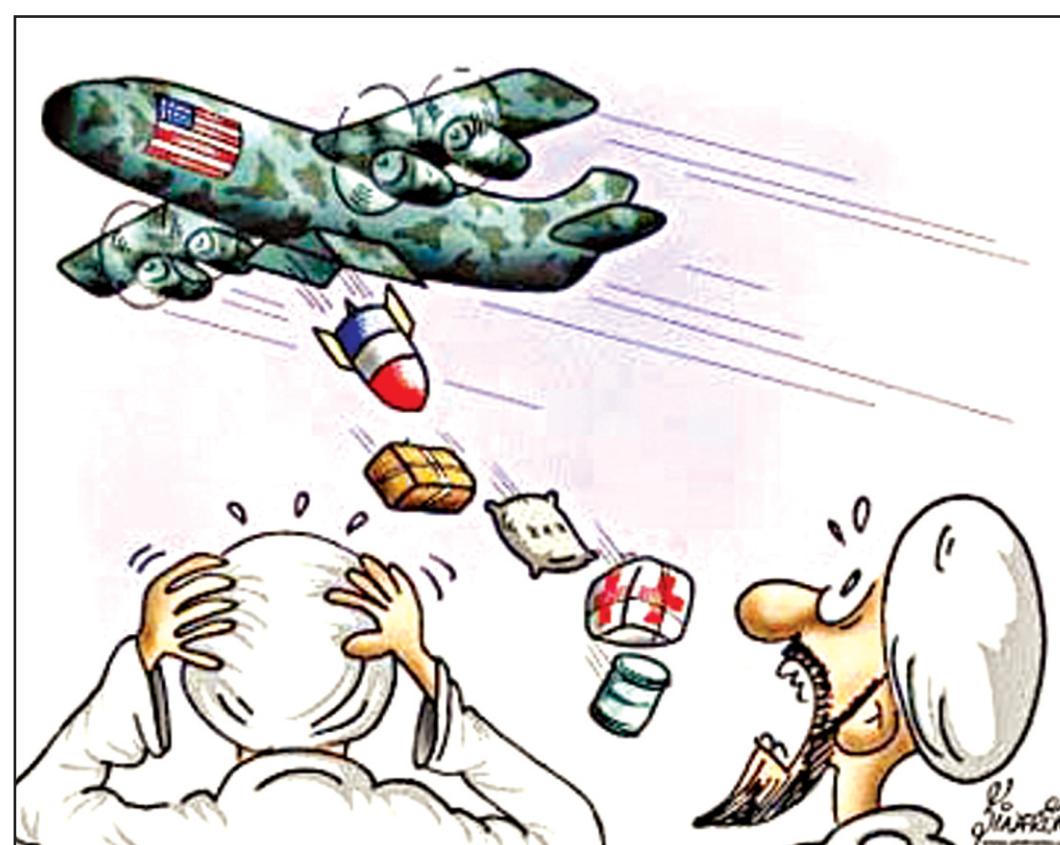
DISSEMBLING

The time-honoured technique of shoring up one's base is to plead the nobility of one's cause.

Just as Islamabad waxed lyrical in March '71 about maintaining the integrity of a disintegrating Pakistan, so did Bush try to place his crumbling Iraq adventure within a high moral context.

He began his speech with stirring words. For "...all free nations, there come moments that decide the direction of a country and reveal the character of its people."

Fair enough. And what pray is that moment? Why, it's nothing more than saving "Iraq's young democracy" from "...terrorists and extremists... at war with us around the world" that want "...to topple Iraq's government, dominate the region and attack us here at home."



No kidding! How come Iraqi resistance that Rumsfeld dubbed as losers have been transformed into this formidable foe!

The only problem with this lofty Bushian rhetoric is that it is unadulterated hyperbole that fools few. Certainly, it has not stopped the

Brits from vacating Basra city, handing over Basra province to Iraqis or altering their troop withdrawal timetable (2,500 out of 5,000 squaddies out next year).

Launching the invasion from multiple base motives-- e.g. revenge for 9/11; imperial hubris; oil;

further shoring up Israel's security as it was bad enough. But bungling the occupation compounded the error.

While thousands of Iraqis have been killed, wounded or made refugees this barely causes Washington discomfort or a ripple in the US media; it's the mounting cost

of US blood and treasure that's caused a huge domestic public backlash against Bush. His popularity is stuck at a dismal 30%. It was 80% on 1 May 2003 when he gave his infamous "Mission Accomplished" speech on carrier Abraham Lincoln. Failure extracts a price.

CRUMBS OF CONCESSION

To placate mounting domestic dissatisfaction increasingly manifested in calls for partial or total withdrawal of GIs from Iraq, 54% want it immediately (Pew Report)– Bush offered crumbs.

About 2,200 Marines leaving the Sunni-dominated Anbar province in September '07 won't be replaced; a combat brigade (4,500 men) will go home by Xmas; and the remaining 20 combat brigades drop to 15 by next July. The base US troop strength in Iraq is 130,000.

The main rationale for this limited phased draw down is the ostensible improvement in Iraq's security situation, especially in al Anbar province, a Sunni stronghold 200 kms west of Baghdad. There, tribal leaders from early 2006 began making overtures and allying themselves with US military whom they previously had resisted fiercely, for two reasons.

First, their growing dislike of al-Qaeda's expanding influence in the province, borne out of attacking the

GIs, which threatened to undercut traditional tribal power base. Added to this was the increasing revulsion both at al-Qaeda's bloody killings of fellow Iraqis epitomised by the delivery in baskets of the severed heads of five children of "uncooperative" tribal elders and its religious extremism.

Second, and equally important, was the marginalization of Sunnis generally in the current Shia-dominated central government. The Anbar Sunnis don't recognize the Maliki administration. They are therefore willing to cooperate with US forces in order to increase their leverage over the Baghdad authorities.

This cooperation was soothed by external money and persuasion, mainly from Riyadh, in order to protect its Sunni coreligionists and, more importantly, curb Tehran's influence, a common Saudi-US goal. The Anbar alliance can be considered a facet of the proxy war US is conducting against Iran.

MARRIAGE OF CONVENIENCE

While this alliance may have pacified Anbar for the moment, it's difficult to see how this promotes sectarian cooperation or increases the centre's influence, both avowed US objectives. In fact, arming the Anbar Sunnis seems contrary to the policy of Iraqification under central control and probably stores big trouble for the future.

It virtually invokes bloody confrontation between the Anbar leaders and the Baghdad government should power-sharing negotiations collapse and the latter decides to extend its writ there, though it may be some time before any central authority will have the will or capacity to do so.

Besides, the Anbar Sunni-US alliance may be a wasting asset. It's likely that once the Sunnis have finished off the al-Qaeda remnants, they will turn their attention to the Americans, whose hated occupier status will then once again occupy front stage, for the Sunnis can hardly relish being called collaborators. The current alliance thus is a marriage of convenience for both sides.

It's worth noting that a September 2006 poll showed that 92% of Sunnis and 62% of Shias favour Sunni and Shia attacks against GIs, so much are they loathed as occupiers. The surge of 30,000 GIs in the past six months has not changed this statistic.

A BBC, ABC News, and Japan's public broadcaster NHK poll released 10 September 2007 revealed 57% - including nearly all Sunnis and half of Shias - said attacks on coalition forces were acceptable. And 47% want US and coalition forces to leave Iraq immediately.

Despite the Maliki government's

parlous condition, the above data suggest that most Iraqis see the US forces as the problem, not the solution. Can Iraqis resolve their problems if the occupiers leave?

The deliberations at a four-day summit in Helsinki held early this September is interesting. Sixteen ethnic Iraqi leaders exchanged ideas on reconciliation and governance with veteran peace negotiators from Sinn Fein, IRA and African National Congress. They issued the so-called Helsinki Agreement committing to disarming warring factions, power-sharing among ethnics and settling disputes peacefully.

The summiters stated that the vision uniting them is "...termination of the presence of foreign troops in Iraq through the completion of national sovereignty." In other words Yankee Go Home.

In this goal, the Agreement reflects not only widespread Iraqi opinion but also the majority of the US public. The writing's on the wall: it's not if but how soon Washington abandons its lost Iraq war.

Whether or not a substantial segment of this withdrawal takes place under Bush's administration is the question. To protect his legacy, Bush has given enough indication that he would like to leave this poisoned chalice for the new president in 2009.

Conditions in Iraq may thwart him.

The author is a freelancer.

Environmental insecurity

ZAK KHAN

BANGLADESH has an approximate population of 150,000 square kilometer and is probably the most populous country in the world. Our economy is on down hill slide and poverty is on upswing as growth rate of GDP is lower than the actual growth rate of population resulting in a low level equilibrium trap. The resource we have is not only inadequate but also fast depleting. A greater percentage of our people live off the land and thus cause degradation of land, fresh water and marine resources. To top it all, our strides for development have paradoxically affected environments because of extensive use of fertilizers, undisrupted exploitation of nature and production of biogas. The cumulative impact of human activities of the nature mentioned above has caused among others: deforestation, topsoil erosion, acidification, depletion of ozone layer and loss of biological diversity.

The local implication of environmental degradation can be observed from the way our economy is sliding. The devastating deluge demonstrated the urgency to address the cause of environmental degradation, which is regarded as chief reason for flooding. This year's flooding has a regional dimension over and above local negligence. All 54 rivers that run through Bangladesh are shared by India where we have virtually no control. Bangladesh is plagued by what M Abdul Hafiz and Nahid Islam termed "Paradox of water" as it receives too much

water during monsoon and too little in the lean period which is between February and April. People were marooned and the flood deprived us of some 3 million tons of food grains. Heavy diversion of Ganges water by India after construction of Farakka barrage has caused siltation of the riverbeds and has decertified a large chunk of our arable land in northwestern Bangladesh, where paddy was grown in abundance. Ground water levels in many areas have dropped by 3 meters. Although an agreement has been signed between Bangladesh and India to ensure supply of water in an agreed formula during the lean period in December 1996, India is yet to honour the agreement in right earnest. On receiving complaints, India has assured to give us the agreed quantum of water in 'future years'. The water-induced effect on our people and economy is enormously negative and socially destabilizing. One would agree that this kind of posture would not augur well on India's global image and will distance her socially from our people. Whatever be the assurances, we have to prepare a tentative framework so that we are able to tide over any overtire by any of the signatory of the water sharing agreement.

The other serious challenge to our environmental security is high rate of population growth. It is apprehended that by early this century our 75 million population in 1971 will double. Bangladesh has

failed to achieve material economic growth due to much impairment besides devastating yearly cyclones and periodical flooding, and the country is not endowed with nature's bounty. This has negated the development efforts of our successive governments. To meet the perennial shortages, a huge amount of money is allocated for import, reducing substantially the amount of investable surpluses. Periodical and flash flooding takes heavy toll of our economy, requiring more investment in this sector, which affects savings. All these factors retard our development by negating the capital formation and reducing substantially the per capita production in all sectors.

Recognizing the growth rate of population as number one national problem, it has been accorded the highest priority to arrest the growth process as an essential part of the development strategy that continues to be so till date. Our concerted effort to achieve the population growth rate of 1.5 percent remains a dream even now. Lower death rate because of provisioning of better health care facilities and higher growth rate of population has deterred the nation from achieving the magical figure of 1.5 percent. Causes of our failure in this sector are many which of course are surmountable provided that the NGOs are encouraged to allocate more funds and invest more efforts to educate the rural mass to adopt means to check the growth. If this problem is not addressed with

greater national commitment, high growth rate of population will persist which will cast its perilous shadow on our near stagnant economy. The other concomitant effects of this unabated growth rate are: menacing unemployment situation, influx of population to urban areas in search of means of livelihood leaving barely enough persons to take care of our vital sector of production i.e. agriculture. Increased population generated problems like development of slum or shanties in the urban areas and increasing number of unemployed itinerants will cause imbalance of eco system and society.

Additional pressure on our fragile eco system came in the form of increased cropping. As cultivation became necessary for feeding the increasing population, vegetation was cleared on a large scale. Massive clearing of vegetation, both for food and fuel, has started showing fatal consequence. "Depleted and denuded, the soil became unable to retain water sufficiently and erosion of top soil became inevitable adjunct of water flowing down." This is why Bangladesh, which is largely dependant on agriculture and primary commodities, is menacingly poised to face a much greater threat to her stability and integrity from environmental degradation. Although our social resilience and cohesion of social fabric is strong, denial and deprivation over the years due to governmental negligence have, of late, set in motion a murmur of

resentment in slums and far flung areas. Bangladesh's economy is unlikely to withstand this additional stress as "we are already suffering from classical signs of poverty, unequal distribution of land and wealth, rapid population growth and huge foreign debt". Let us not forget the oft-repeated statement of the fatalist that disasters seek out the poor and ensure that they stay poor. So, while pondering over mapping a development strategy one should not lose sight of means of reducing the risk of environmental imbalance. This necessitates a comprehensive study to plan firstly to save a further biodegradation and finally to rehabilitate the vulnerabilities of environmental insecurity. Any flawed planning will exacerbate the factor of degradation and expose more and more people to poverty. Building non tangible assets, strengthening every day livelihood, planning

based on local priorities, Raising awareness about the dire necessity to protect the environment of biodegradation and hectic political and diplomatic dialogue with the stake holding nations for evolving a mutually agreed agenda for cooperation are but a few suggestions that could be found handy for future planning.

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US led joint naval exercise in the Bay of Bengal: A gunboat diplomacy

HASAN TARIQUE CHOWDHURY

We can recall our history when U.S. Navy's Seventh Fleet came to the Bay of Bengal in 1971 to defeat the Liberation War of Bangladesh. It was the time when this fleet tried to intimidate India as it fought Pakistan along with Bangladeshi freedom fighter in a war that led to Bangladesh's birth. It was the period when Indian foreign policy upheld the principles of Non Align Movement and followed the path towards self-reliance. But now, the scenario has been changed.

Ironically, last week, the same Seventh Fleet was back in the same waters, equipped with a second aircraft carrier, a nuclear submarine and scores of fighter jets in the biggest U.S. naval assembly in 36 years. According to Reuters, the fleet anchored under cloudy skies in the middle of the Bay of Bengal was the U.S. aircraft carrier Kitty Hawk, which was involved in the war against Iraq in 2003, while INS Viraat, India's lone aircraft carrier, sailed alongside.

This event clearly signals that

joining a "strategic security cooperation" with the US, Australia and Japan. The "jathas", led by CPI (M) General Secretary Prakash Karat from Chennai and his CPI counterpart A B Bardhan from Kolkata, had coincided with the joint exercises India had with the navies of the US, Japan, Australia and Singapore which concluded in Visakhapatnam on September eight. Not only the political parties, the high-ranking security experts of India consider this exercise as a "recipe for greater instability in the Asia-Pacific region".

According to them it may even instigate a new cold war in this region and also may accelerate the arms race among the neighbouring countries of South Asia in a new level. They even consider this Naval Drill as the first step to establish an Asian NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) aimed to encircle China.

While this is the evaluation of Indian Security experts and left political parties, what would the Bangladeshi security experts say? Will they welcome again the seventh fleet? Will they hail the impending arms race in

the South Asian Region caused by the recent Indian foreign policy? Or oppose this imperial war game?

Although CPB and some other left political parties of Bangladesh condemned this war game in the Bay of Bengal, but interestingly the major political parties who claim themselves as pioneer of Liberation War 1971 and protector of sovereignty of Bangladesh remained silent over this critical issue. Perhaps they are not so much concerned about the importance of natural resources and geo-political location of Bangladesh or they are very busy with their arrested leaders and cadres! So the national security is not their concern at this moment! But the patriotic and peace loving people of Bangladesh are very much concerned about the intention of this war game in the Bay of Bengal. The voice has been raised by the people of Bangladesh, India and Pakistan as well as the people of this region to build up united resistance against aggressive move by the US.

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China and the Indo-US Nuclear Deal

JABIN T JACOB

AFTER over two years of intense negotiations, the article has also acknowledged India's legitimate aspirations. However, there are also notes of worry in India's commentary. Given India's desire "to become a big power," the US wish to incorporate India in its attempt to "balance the forces of Asia," is something, the editorial says. "It fits in exactly with India's wishes." This last section has been interpreted to indicate Chinese opposition to the deal. Nevertheless, the manner in which recent Chinese comments have been phrased, whether in the media or in Foreign Ministry statements, remind the observer of China's own rationale behind developing its nuclear program and probably give an idea of how it will proceed in its reactions to the Indo-US deal. First, it is suggested - perhaps to domestic hardliners - that with needs that are similar to China's, India cannot be faulted when it adopts methods similar to what China has adopted. India is doing what it thinks is best in its national interests and this is something that the Chinese understand. Second, the Chinese seem to realize that they have nothing to gain from opposing the deal at the NSG but everything to gain in goodwill and perhaps economic bounty in the form of expanding their own civilian nuclear cooperation with other countries not least with India

and the US. China has for some two years now been offering to cooperate in the civilian nuclear energy sector with India; Hu Jintao repeated the offer during his visit in November 2006. China already has ties with the US in this sector - in July this year, it signed a multi-billion dollar contract with Westinghouse for building four third-generation nuclear reactors - but seeks further relaxation of American restrictions on high-technology transfers. Were China to cooperate at the NSG, it could result in what it is fond of calling "win-win," all around. Third, a positive response to the deal also allows China an increased range of responses vis-a-vis the US on North Korea, Iran and Pakistan. Thus, plans for increased Chinese nuclear cooperation with Pakistan cannot necessarily draw the condemnation of either New Delhi or Washington unless they appear to be explicitly vitiating the peace. However, the Chinese are perhaps not unaware that while they might continue supporting Pakistan's nuclear program, it is just as likely that India could also soon be closely engaged in nuclear cooperation with Japan. The question therefore is, if China and India will simply let things take their "natural" course or take the bold steps necessary to ensure that the balance of forces in Asia changes to mutual advantage.

Courtesy:IPCS, New Delhi

