

## The essence of Eid-ul-Azha

*Its true spirit should not be lost on us*

THE nation will observe Eid-ul Azha tomorrow with the usual religious gaiety and fervor. For Muslims the occasion should not be confined to the ritual of sacrificing animals only. It is essential to understand the true spirit behind the religious practice that commenced with Allah putting Prophet Ibrahim (PBUH) to a most difficult trial, to test the depth of his love for, and faith in, the Almighty, by calling upon Prophet Ibrahim (PBUH) to sacrifice his most beloved possession. Not only did the Prophet Ibrahim readily surrender to the will of the Almighty, Ismail, his son, also readily agreed. And the rest is known to all of us.

The infinite faith by surrendering to the wishes of Allah and the patience displayed by both the father and the son is the spirit that should be the guiding principles of every Muslim. It was this practice that the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) reestablished in order to inculcate in his followers the spirit of subservience to Allah, and surrender to His will. This is the foundation of the Islamic teaching of sacrifice in fulfilment of Allah's command provided in the Quran, "to your Lord turn in prayer and sacrifice."

The aim of sacrifice, like all other fundamentals of Islam, is to imbibe piety and self righteousness. It also promotes the spirit of sacrifice for a right cause. To explicate its purpose, the Quran says, "It is not their meat, nor their blood, that reaches Allah; it is their piety that reaches Him."

Unfortunately, it appears that we have lost sight of the true meaning of this day. The brazen display of ostentatious behaviour in competing with one's neighbour to surpass not only in size but also in the cost of the sacrificial animal does very little to uphold the true meaning of the day.

This is the day on which we should not only take a fresh resolve to be imbued with the spirit of sacrifice for the right cause, it is also an occasion on which we undertake to expurgate from within us the base elements that keep us away from the righteous path. It is a day that should be marked by austere behaviour motivated by the desire to share with the less fortunate ones.

Eid Mubarrak to all our readers.

## Business goals

*Next government will hopefully listen*

THE business leaders of the country have identified some important goals for the next government's consideration in order that Bangladesh can become a middle-income country. Towards attaining the 8 percent growth target the elected government will have to overcome the power crisis with greater acumen, take steps to increase private sector investment, encourage foreign direct investment and strategise effective branding of Bangladesh. The clarion call came from a seminar titled "Maximising Growth for Bangladesh: A Private Sector Vision", organised by the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI) in the city. Eminent economist Wahiduddin Mahmud made it known that "Bangladesh is the only nation in South Asia, which maintained 5 percent GDP growth rate in five successive years, despite some major obstacles."

With some disconcerting statistics of a downward slide of our growth indicators, there is no alternative to ensuring vigorous development of all the major sectors to reach the target of 8 percent economic growth. Therefore, the government that will take up the reins after the election, will have to have the development blueprint ready well before it starts functioning. Among others, they will have to give emphasis on skill development of the existing manpower through imparting vocational training, develop the IT sector, boost the small and medium scale enterprise, increase export of high-valued products, give attention to environmentally sustainable projects and improve regional connectivity. Improvement of the legal system came under discussion and we feel that a great deal of focus needs to be given to reforming existing laws that would provide our entrepreneurs legal coverage in national and international deals. It is matter of urgency that we have clearly defined laws regarding dumping of low quality and harmful commodities on our soil and focusing on issues of intellectual property rights. Maritime boundaries of the country also need to be demarcated to ensure our access to immense sea resources that are legally ours.

The concept of setting up of a 'Brand Bangladesh' taskforce to take necessary steps to improve the image of Bangladesh abroad is possibly a novel one that must be given priority. The core committee, as suggested, should comprise officials from the BoI, Export Promotion Bureau, the foreign ministry, FBCCI and non-resident Bangladeshi groups from Europe and the US.

We believe a lot of work will have to be done by the next government to increase economic growth to the desired level.

## My role model

### NO NONSENSE

Nurul Islam was one of the few politicians along with Motia Chowdhury, Rashed Khan Menon, and Hyder Akbar Khan whom I know joined politics for altruistic service to the browbeaten in our society. Much to the utter shock and grave trepidation of the people, Bangladesh has lost a rare breed of the stature of Nurul Islam, who died in a very dreadful way.

ABDULLAH A. DEWAN

IF you have asked me last week who, if any, is my role model, I would have emphatically said none. To me having a role model meant: "I'm second to someone." But it's now much too late to tell the person that in life and now in his death and for as long as I live he was and he will always remain my role model.

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Reminiscing the distant past and then translating in words in how many intrinsic ways Nurul Islam Bhai (NIB) had shaped my thinking during my DU years and thereafter is a near impossible task. But I must acknowledge a few. Were it not for NIB, I'm not sure if I would have:

- Studied physics instead of engineering or economics. In fact, in one of our get-togethers in February, he casually reminded me once that I couldn't have studied the other two subjects (nuclear engineering and economics) had I not started with physics.
- Been a member of the then East Pakistan Students' Union (EPSU).
- Received compensation from DU Vice-Chancellor Osman Gani for my books and personal belongings stolen by then Governor Monayem Khan's NSF hooligans who ransacked my room on a day of

campus-wide unrest in 1964 against Ayub Monayem's repressive governance.

- Been rescued from an inevitable assault by NSF's Khoka and his followers when I was passing by DU science cafeteria building, where NSF and EPSU were skirmishing with stones and hockey sticks. NSF and university-wide students knew me as the cousin of Iqbal Hall's VP Nurul Islam.
- Ever become a newspaper columnist and cognitively wired to write commentaries on social and political issues of Bangladesh.

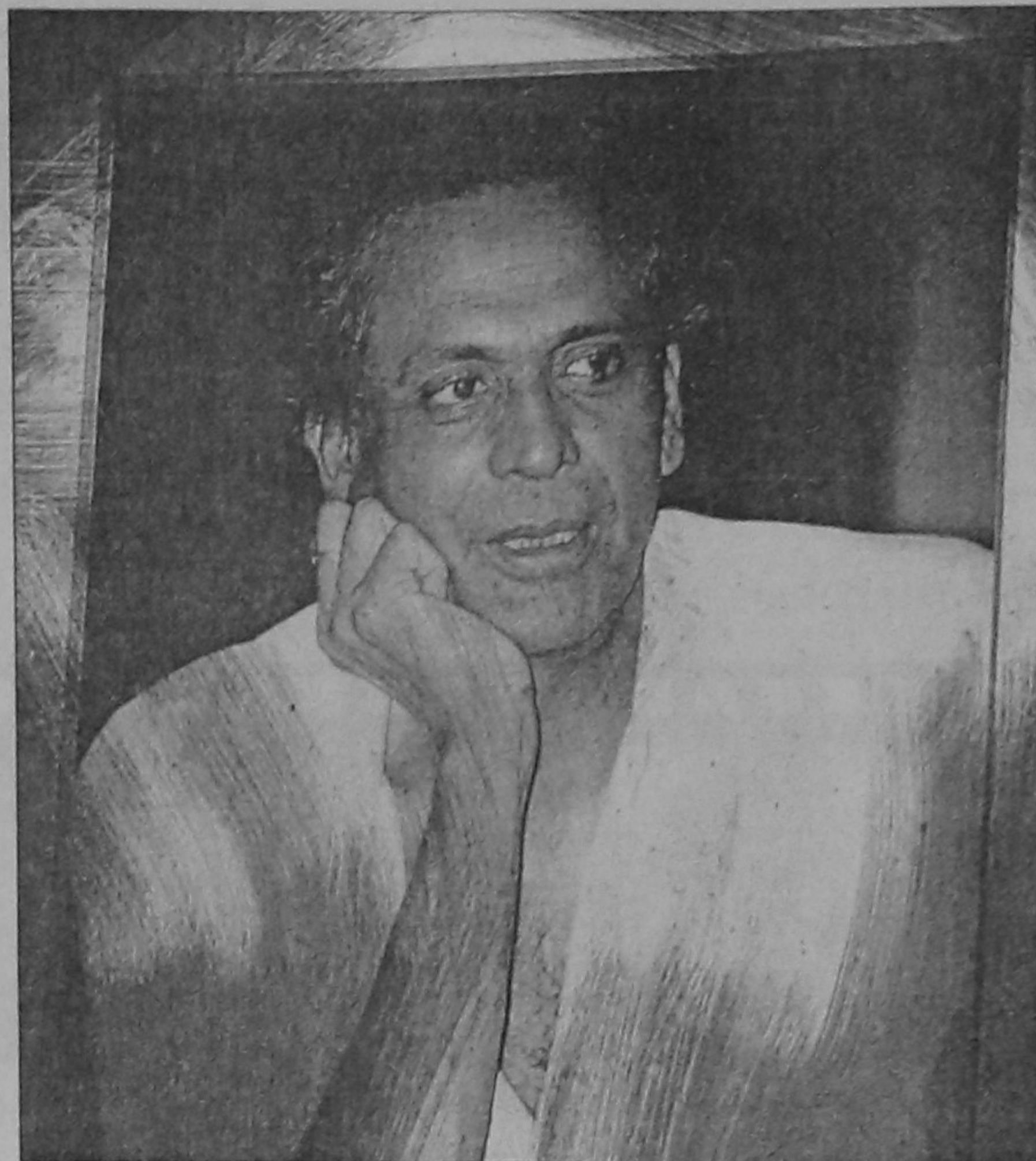
Nearly 75% of my last four years op-ed articles in The Daily Star are political commentaries. While writing these pieces, I always consulted NIB, if I needed him to check facts and figures and then asked for his views on my perspectives. He would always check my facts without ever -- even once trying to influence my views and focus.

He was always circumspect in his comments and advised me to be objective and fair and avoid any iota of self-promotion in my writings in order to get recognition as a credible columnist.

Before he succumbed to unconsciousness, I watched him saying on TV about the threats he had been receiving over telephone soon after he received his nomination for the Noakhali-1 constituency.

"There is the sense of mystery," wrote the December 5 DS editorial, "surrounding the incident and, unless a purposeful investigation is undertaken over the matter, we might face the sad possibility of the entire sordid episode fizzling out into amnesia."

Discovery of the fons et origo of the fire if



Nurul Islam

it was indeed an act of arson and subsequent hanging of the criminals wouldn't compensate for his loss. However, all of us relatives and admirers alike are asking for an effective and immediate investigation if the 3:00 am inferno in his apartment was indeed arson and who the arsonists are. It will certainly bring some relief to us all and the case will be closed.

Watching the frightful news on TV with Nazneen Dewan was heartbreaking. We couldn't even look at each other in our disbelief and shock, and broke into tears. Last time when Nazneen visited Bangladesh, NIB's only son Tomohar (who died instantly in the fire) hosted his aunt in many of the nicest restaurants in

Dhaka as often as she was available.

We didn't try to contact NIB's wife poet Rubi Islam and his only daughter Moutusi Islam who were in the US when this horrible tragedy had occurred. How could we tell them what happened?

Rubi Apa had always treated us as extended family members ever since she was married to NIB. We even shared the same apartment with them in Dhanmondi for a while soon after our marriage. We're not sure how we would ever face Rubi Apa, how we would start our conversations when we meet, and what we would talk about.

Dr. Abdullah A. Dewan is Professor of Economics at Eastern Michigan University.

## Gagsters and gangsters

### BYLINE

I wonder if politicians understand one law of public affairs. Everyone can survive criticism. And no one can survive ridicule. The gagster flourishes only when ridicule is the only weapon left in a democracy, until the day of voting arrives.

M.J. AKBAR

WE have enough evidence: there is a cabal of cyber terrorists employed by mobile phone companies to destabilise the honourable government of Dr. Manmohan Singh with evil jokes. Who else could be manufacturing those SMSs that begin to circulate whenever opportunity arises? This is a professional hit job. This is not the work of amateurs.

If stand-up comedians like Jay Leno can hire professional gag-writers, so can mobile phone companies, since each SMS joke that is circulated means revenue for hungry coffers. The government seems to be as impotent against gagsters within the country as it is against gangsters from across the border.

We had hardly blinked upon hearing that our smug finance minister had become even smugger after being transferred to home affairs when a solemn SMS landed on my machine: "Let us pray that Chidambaram succeeds in bringing down terrorism the way he has brought down share prices."

If this is not sedition at a moment of national crisis, then please let me know the meaning of sedition. The gagster, moreover, has the temerity to be subtle. This is not one of those ha-ha husband-wife jokes. This is serious stuff.

This was followed by a committee effort, for I cannot believe that only one gagster dreamt this whole bit up: "Chidambaram's report card after 6 months. (1): Police to people ratio increased from 14 per lakh to 14,0012 per lakh. How? One million commit suicide due to inflation. One lakh die in explosions, 25 lakhs in crime and accidents, three million migrate out of India due to fear. (2): Holding and folding dhoti time reduced by 5%. Big productivity gains. (3): Duties of all DGPs outsourced to FPOs, Homeguards, excise department and his ex-Harvard associates. (4): Police to be paid in oil bonds only. (5): RDX imports attract higher penalties. (6): Duties slashed for substandard bulletproof jackets. (7): Service tax to be imposed on Bangladeshi infiltrators at border crossings. (8): Visa entry tax imposed only on Nepalis. (9): 25% entry tax on all AK Series rifles and all types of grenades. (10): If you still survive... then see you in 2009! But be ready for tax on your happiness and survival!"

I have been wondering about that phrase "If you still survive..." Is that a double entendre? At one level of course the gagster was referring to you and me, and the bleak possibilities of our survival against gangsters. But could he be also, obliquely, referring to bleaker possibility of

Chidambaram's survival as home minister?

Note that the report card was limited to six months. Why? I sense something sinister here. Has he already drawn the conclusion that this arrangement will end before six months? What are the facts?

No matter how long Dr. Manmohan Singh and Mrs. Sonia Gandhi drag out the life of this dying government with virility injections that turn out to be too watery, they have to hold general elections by April. That is it. In 15 weeks at the outside, and probably within 13 weeks, the great electoral contraption will begin to whirr. This means that the Election Commission will declare the season open around mid-March, after which government really becomes a holding operation. Expect results in the first week of May.

Is the gagster saying that this lot in Delhi will not return to power? A fellow gagster certainly thinks so. I quote: "We have taken care of the men who came by boat. Time now to sort out the idiots who came by votes." Mumbai predictably evoked anger. This gag was not quite a gag, but rose from the heart: "Forgiving a terrorist is left to God. But fixing their appointment with God is our responsibility." Laughter may be the best medicine for anger, but there are times when you do not want the relief of such medicine.

Has some of the gagster gone too far? The SMS about the Kerala chief minister cannot be printed in a family newspaper. But it did very well on SMS, for whom laws of libel have not yet been invented.

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There is a point at which the gagster can run out of gags. After a week of dithering, when Maharashtra was effectively without a government despite being in the throes of its most serious crisis, the Congress finally installed a new chief minister, Ashok Chavan, and its ally, Sharad Pawar, made Chhagan Bhujbal the deputy chief minister.

The SMS that followed was not a gag: "Chhagan Bhujbal, a man who was single-handedly responsible for the complete decay and corruption in the police force and was removed for his involvement in the Telgi scam has been rewarded to head the home department (sic) again by the NCP. So much for the show of force by Mumbaikars. We should not take this lying down. Forward this message to as many as possible."

Dear Mumbaikars, I am doing my bit.

M.J. Akbar is Chief Editor of the Asian Age.

## The limits of US power



Hemmed in?

This approach might strike some as cynical. It would do little to foster democracy or promote human rights. But Bush couldn't deliver on those promises anyway, and it is ultimately up to individual countries to determine their own political systems.

JOHN J. MEARSHEIMER

THE United States is in deep trouble in the Middle East. Despite Barack Obama's promises to withdraw from Iraq, the debacle there shows no sign of ending soon. Hamas rules in Gaza; Iran is quickly moving to acquire a nuclear deterrent. We need a radically different strategy for the region.

Fortunately, there is a strategy that has proved effective in the past and could serve again today: "Offshore balancing." It's less ambitious than President Bush's grand plan to spread democracy throughout the Middle East, but it would be much better at protecting actual U.S. interests. The United States would station its military forces outside the region. And "balancing" would mean we'd rely on regional powers like Iran, Iraq and Saudi Arabia to check each other.

Washington would remain diplomatically engaged, and when necessary would assist the weaker side in a conflict. It would also use its air and naval power to respond quickly to unexpected threats. But -- and this is the key point -- America would put boots on the ground only if the local balance of power seriously broke down and one country threatened to dominate the others.

This approach might strike some as cynical. It would do little to foster democracy or promote human rights. But Bush couldn't deliver on those promises anyway, and it is ultimately up to individual countries to determine their own political systems. It is hardly cynical to base U.S. strategy on a realistic appraisal of American interests and a clear-eyed sense of what U.S. power can and cannot accomplish.

Offshore balancing is nothing new: the United States pursued such a strategy in the Middle East quite successfully

during much of the Cold War. America helped Iraq contain revolutionary Iran in the 1980s. Then, when Iraq's conquest of Kuwait in 1990 threatened to tilt things in Baghdad's favour, the United States assembled a multinational coalition to smash Saddam Hussein's military machine.

The strategy has three particular virtues. First, it would significantly reduce the chances that we would get involved in another bloody and costly war like Iraq. America doesn't need to control the Middle East with its own forces; it merely needs to ensure that no other country does.

Second, offshore balancing would ameliorate America's terrorism problem. Foreign occupiers generate fierce resentment. Keeping America's military forces out of sight would minimise the anger created by having them stationed on Arab soil.

Third, offshore balancing would reduce fears in Iran and Syria that the United States aims to attack them and remove their regimes -- a key reason these states are currently seeking weapons of mass destruction. Persuading Tehran to abandon its nuclear program will require Washington to address Iran's legitimate security concerns and to refrain from overt threats.

A final, compelling reason to adopt this approach is that nothing else has worked. After the Gulf war, the Clinton administration pursued a "dual containment" strategy: instead of using Iraq and Iran to check each other, the United States began trying to contain both. As a result, both came to view the United States as a bitter enemy. The policy also required the United States to deploy large numbers of troops in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, which helped persuade Osama bin Laden to declare war on America.

Offshore balancing wouldn't eliminate all the problems we face in the Middle East. But it would be considerably less expensive in both human and financial terms. It's not a foolproof strategy, but it's probably as close as we can get.

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