

# Lailat - ul - Baraat

Let all of us say with all the earnestness the following dua, which the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) himself recited: "O Allah, I seek refuge in Thy good pleasure from Thine anger, and in Thy forgiveness from Thy punishment, and I seek refuge 'in Thee from Thee' from Thy wrath. I cannot reckon the praise due to Thee. Thou art as Thou hast glorified Thyself."

SYED ASHRAF ALI

LAILAT-UL-BARAAT, the auspicious night of the 15th of Shaban (popularly known as Shab-e-Baraat in this subcontinent), is a glorious and important occasion in the life of every Muslim. Both the words *Lailat* (in Arabic) and *Shab* (in Persian) mean night, and *Baraat* means salvation or privilege or quittance.

Many in this subcontinent mistakenly think that this holy night is Shab-e-Barat or the "Night of Fortune." But Lailat-ul Baraat is actually the "Night of Salvation" or "Night of Privilege." It is on this propitious night that Benign Providence, in His infinite mercy, blesses each and every human being with a unique opportunity to receive the most coveted Divine mercy.

It is true that Lailat-ul-Baraat has not been directly or specifically mentioned in the Holy Quran. But that does not, in any way, empower any Muslim to ignore, or make little of, the divine excellence of the Night of Salvation because there are numerous authentic hadith and historic evidence, transmitted or recognised by renowned traditionalists and universally revered saint and seers, who eloquently testify to the fact that the holy Prophet Muhammad (SA) himself used to attach great importance to this extraordinary night and say special prayers on this

sacred occasion.

Unfortunately, however, there are still some who claim that Lailat-ul-Baraat has no religious significance in the eyes of Islam. Nothing can be farther from the truth. The holy Prophet Muhammad (SA) not only said special prayers on this sacred night but also visited graveyards and prayed for the departed souls. He even instructed Ummahatul Mu'mineen (his pious wives) to honour the sanctity and divine excellence of this blessed occasion. What is more, a reliable tradition also testifies that Bibi Ayesha Siddiqah (RA) visited a graveyard on this *mubarak* night of salvation in search of the holy Prophet of Islam (pbuh).

An acclaimed traditionalist, Ibn Maja, reported on the authority of no less a person than Sher-e-Khuda Hazrat Ali ibn Abu Talib (RA) that the holy Prophet (pbuh) had said: "On this night, from the moment the sun sets, Allah descends on the firmament of this earth and goes on asking till sunrise: 'Is there no one who asks forgiveness so that I may forgive him? Is there no one who asks provision so that I may provide him? Is there no one afflicted so that I may relieve him? Is there not such and such? Is there not such and such?'"

The holy Prophet (pbuh) never failed to avail this unique and glorious opportunity and himself used to pray all through

this Night of Privilege every year with a view to receiving mercy from the most gracious and most merciful Allah.

On one occasion, the holy Prophet (pbuh) spent half of this auspicious night through a Nafl prayer of two *rakahs* and the rest through a long *sijdah* or prostration. Hazrat Ayesha Siddiqah (RA) reported that on one such occasion the holy Prophet (pbuh) was so deeply absorbed in His meditation and remained so long in prostration that she became awfully nervous and thought that He (pbuh) had shuffled off the mortal coil.

Abu Busa al-Ashari (RA) reported Allah's Messenger (pbuh) as saying: "Allah Most High looks down in the middle night of Sha'ban and forgives all his creatures, except a polytheist or one who is hostile."

Hazrat Ayesha Siddiqah (RA) said: "I missed Allah's Messenger (pbuh) one night and found him at al-Baqi (Jannatul Baqi). He (pbuh) said: 'Were you afraid that Allah and His Messenger would act wrongly towards you?' I replied: 'Messenger of Allah, I thought you had gone to one of your wives.' He said: 'On the middle night of Sha'ban Allah Most High descends to the lowest heaven and forgives more sins than the hairs of the goats of Kalb.'"

It is also reported that the holy Prophet (pbuh) said: "Allah forgives every Muslim on this night. He does not, however, forgive the *mushrik*, the jealous, the cruel, and the adulterer."

According to another tradition, Hazrat Ayesha Siddiqah (RA) reported the holy Prophet (pbuh) as saying: "Do you know what happens on this night?" meaning the middle night of Sha'ban. She asked: "What happens on it, Messenger of Allah?" He replied: "On it a record is made of every human being who will be born and of every human being who will die

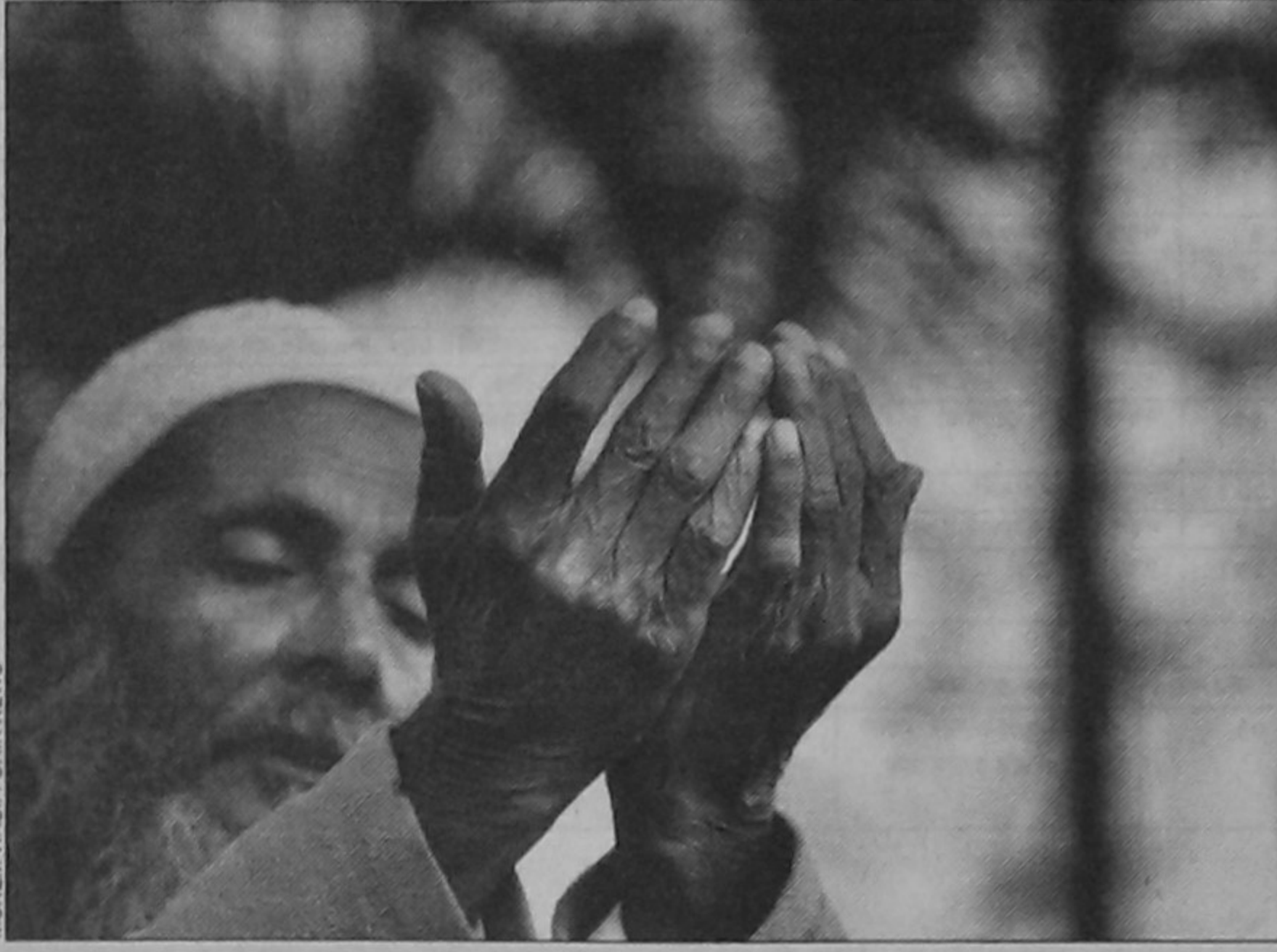
this year; on it their actions are taken up to heaven and on it their provisions are sent down."

"According to popular belief," corroborates the Encyclopaedia of Islam, "on the night preceding the 15th of Sha'ban the tree of life on whose leaves are written the names of the living is shaken to decide who is going to die in the coming year." It is claimed by some that it is the Sidratul Muntaha, "the Lote-tree of the extremity," a tree in the seventh heaven having its root in the sixth, which is shaken to decide who is going to die. (Sidratul Muntaha has been mentioned twice in the Holy Quran).

It is not only the renowned traditionalists who champion the sacredness and excellence of the Night of Salvation, but even a great and universally accepted saint and scholar like Hazrat Syed Abdul Qadir Jilani (RA), popularly known as Hazrat Bara Pir Sahib, testifies in his *Guniyat Talebin*, that Bibi Ayesha Siddiqah herself heard the holy Prophet (pbuh) saying: "Allah opens the doors of mercy and grace for mankind on four nights -- the two nights of Eids, the night of the 15th of Sha'ban, and the night of Arafat." (The two other nights, Shab-e-Qadr and Shab-e-Mi'raj, have been specifically referred to in the Holy Quran). The doors remain open till the Fajr prayer.

Hundreds and thousands of Muslims in the subcontinent celebrate this night through zealous and active participation in private and congregational prayers held in mosques. Unfortunately, however, there are many among us who, through sheer ignorance or utter carelessness, turn this auspicious night into a mere occasion of pleasure and gaiety, fun and frolic, forgetting the very essence of this glorious night.

There are some who think that crackers and candles are part and parcel of



Forgiveness is in Allah's hands.

Shab-e-Baraat. This awful custom, introduced by the Barmecides in Baghdad, simply because they were fire-worshippers and loved fire even after they accepted Islam, not only disturbs the namazis and meditators on this auspicious night but also leads to unnecessary wastage and prodigality, which are forbidden in Islam.

There are also some who try to equate *halwa* and *roti* with the sacred Night of Privilege, claiming that the holy Prophet (pbuh) lost a few teeth at the Battle of Uhud on the 15th of Sha'ban and hence people should not cook anything hard as a mark of respect to that historic incident. Some also claim that Hazrat Amir Hamza (RA) embraced martyrdom on the 15th of Sha'ban. Both these claims are totally baseless as both the incidents occurred in

the month of Shawal.

There is no harm if *halwa* and other sweetmeats are cooked on this occasion, but let these be shared with the poor and the have-nots. The very spirit of such a noble and auspicious occasion will be lost if those who are affluent fail to share their good fortune with those who are less privileged.

And lastly, let all of us say with all the earnestness the following *dua*, which the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) himself recited: "O Allah, I seek refuge in Thy good pleasure from Thine anger, and in Thy forgiveness from Thy punishment, and I seek refuge 'in Thee from Thee' from Thy wrath. I cannot reckon the praise due to Thee. Thou art as Thou hast glorified Thyself."

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# Racism and the Republicans

Make no mistake, although all three stories raised eyebrows and heated discussions, they created no racial tension or ill feelings. The stories have one unfortunate common denominator -- racism.

ABDULLAH A. DEWAN

THREE stories that have kept the US news media on a breath taking slew of commentaries in recent weeks, producing some of the worst racial hype in years. First: President Obama's nomination of Sonia Sotomayor -- a federal judge on the Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit -- to replace the retiring Supreme Court Justice David Souter had stirred the Republican base to try to denigrate and defeat the nomination.

Sotomayor, a Princeton graduate and a Yale Jurist Doctor, has heard appeals in more than 3,000 cases and has written about 380 opinions in the Second Circuit, is considered more experienced than any of the present sitting Supreme Court justices.

Raised as a Catholic, Sotomayor is of Puerto Rican descent and was born in the Bronx, New York. Her judicial philosophy is moderately liberal and hence won't tilt the current imbalance in the US Supreme Court. Once confirmed, she will be the Court's 111th justice -- a first ever

Hispanic justice, and its third female justice.

Her three days of confirmation hearing in the Judicial Committee had turned out to be one of the harshest and most grueling interrogations by Republican Senators. Her Achilles' heel was a line she used in her past speeches: I would hope that a wise Latina woman with the richness of her experiences would more often than not reach a better conclusion than a white male who hasn't lived that life.

Although, her detractors could not produce any evidence of any racial bias in her judicial rulings, her rhetorical comment -- taken out of context -- caused Republican Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich to dismiss her as a racist. Fox TV's relentless negativities with race baiting remarks and conservative Republican's propagation of misinformation have vitiated the airwaves -- if nothing else.

Second: Harvard Professor Henry Louis Gates -- a nationally known academician -- was arrested on July 16 from his home after a neighbour called the



Cambridge police and reported that two men were breaking the back door of a nearby house. The police responded and encountered Gates and his driver after Gates had forced his entry into the house. Sergeant James Crowley arrested Gates when he refused to show his identification and did not comply with sergeant's order to come out of the house. The charge was "disorderly conduct," which has since been dropped.

Massachusetts Governor David Patrick -- an African American -- characterized Gates's arrest as "every black man's nightmare." The incident captured the nation's attention when President Obama -- a long-time Gates friend -- commented in a nationally televised news conference that the "police officer acted stupidly." Fox TV commentators Glenn Beck and others accused Obama for racial profiling of the white policeman

and called Obama a "racist." Glenn said "Obama hates white people," knowing full well that his mother was white and he was raised by loving white grandparents.

Obama retracted his comment by saying that he should have chosen his words carefully. However, he apparently succeeded in defusing the racially charged situation by inviting Professor Gates and Sergeant Crowley to talk it over a beer in the White House.

Third: This is the most bizarre of the three stories -- that Obama isn't US a citizen by birth and hence, is an illegitimate president. Such a baseless controversy was raised during Obama's presidential campaign as well, but quickly run out of steam.

But now a group of people called the "birthers" (consisting of most Southerners and Republicans) has revived that controversy. Last week, even some US Congressmen refused to affirm Obama's US citizenship.

California attorney Orly Taitz -- a leader of the birthers movement -- has released a copy of "what appears to be" an Obama birth certificate from the Republic of Kenya. The problem is that "Republic of Kenya" didn't exist when Obama was born (on December 12, 1961) said David Waldman in *DailyKos*. The alleged Kenyan birth certificate was issued by the Republic of Kenya on February 27, 1964, but according to Wikipedia Kenya became independent

on December 12, 1963, and declared itself a Republic a year later.

President Obama's actual Honolulu birth certificate has been produced many times, and has been reviewed by many people -- it's also posted in the internet. But these deranged people won't accept it, regardless of any evidence. These people are just not happy that a black man is America's president. Their childish whining will continue endlessly in one form or another as long as Obama remains the president.

Make no mistake, although all three stories raised eyebrows and heated discussions, they created no racial tension or ill feelings. The stories have one unfortunate common denominator -- racism. Bill Maher, in his HBO show "Real time with Bill Maher," said it all. Not all Republicans are racist but a racist is much more likely a Republican.

An appropriate answer to these people would be to remind them that in about 35 years blacks and Hispanics are projected to become the majority while whites will become the minority. Ask them, what if -- although it is an unlikely scenario -- the power structure turns into one in which today's minorities exercise real power over the whites 35 years from now?

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# W. doesn't live here anymore

Obama's major difficulties predictably derive from reacting too strongly against the Clinton model. Where Clinton went wrong by being too controlling, Obama has given up too much control. Leaving the specifics to Congress has led to a classic sausage-making festival.

JACOB WEISBERG

POLITICIANS, like generals, suffer from a tendency to fight the last war. Having meticulously studied the mistakes of their predecessors, they take care to avoid repeating them and make the opposite ones. They fortify Maginot Lines. They overcompensate for past errors. They overcorrect.

It is difficult to think of a contemporary president who has not fallen prey to this temptation. Jimmy Carter reacted against Richard Nixon's ruthlessness and Lyndon B. Johnson's horse trading by becoming both too nice and too disdainful of congressional politics.

Carter's micromanagement encouraged Ronald Reagan's propensity for detachment. Bill Clinton came to Washington intent on reversing George H.W. Bush's excessive focus on foreign policy -- and proceeded to neglect foreign policy for his first few years. George W.

Bush reversed his father's lack of vision and Clinton's indiscipline with his own excesses of grandiosity and punctuality. Even vice presidents do it: blathering, peripheral Joe Biden is the excessive response to silent, all-powerful Dick Cheney.

Barack Obama, too, seems to be caught in this dialectical rut. His early difficulties with health-care reform, which will probably be the defining domestic initiative of his presidency, are the consequence of overlearning Clinton's lessons.

Of course, Clinton's mistakes were fateful and ought not to be repeated. Bill and Hillary were far too controlling of the details of policy and not skillful enough at forging political consensus. They drafted an indigestible, 1,342-page bill in secret, and then dumped it on Congress's doorstep. Rather than compromise, Clinton waved his veto pen.

You can diagram Team Obama's game plan by reversing the Clinton playbook.

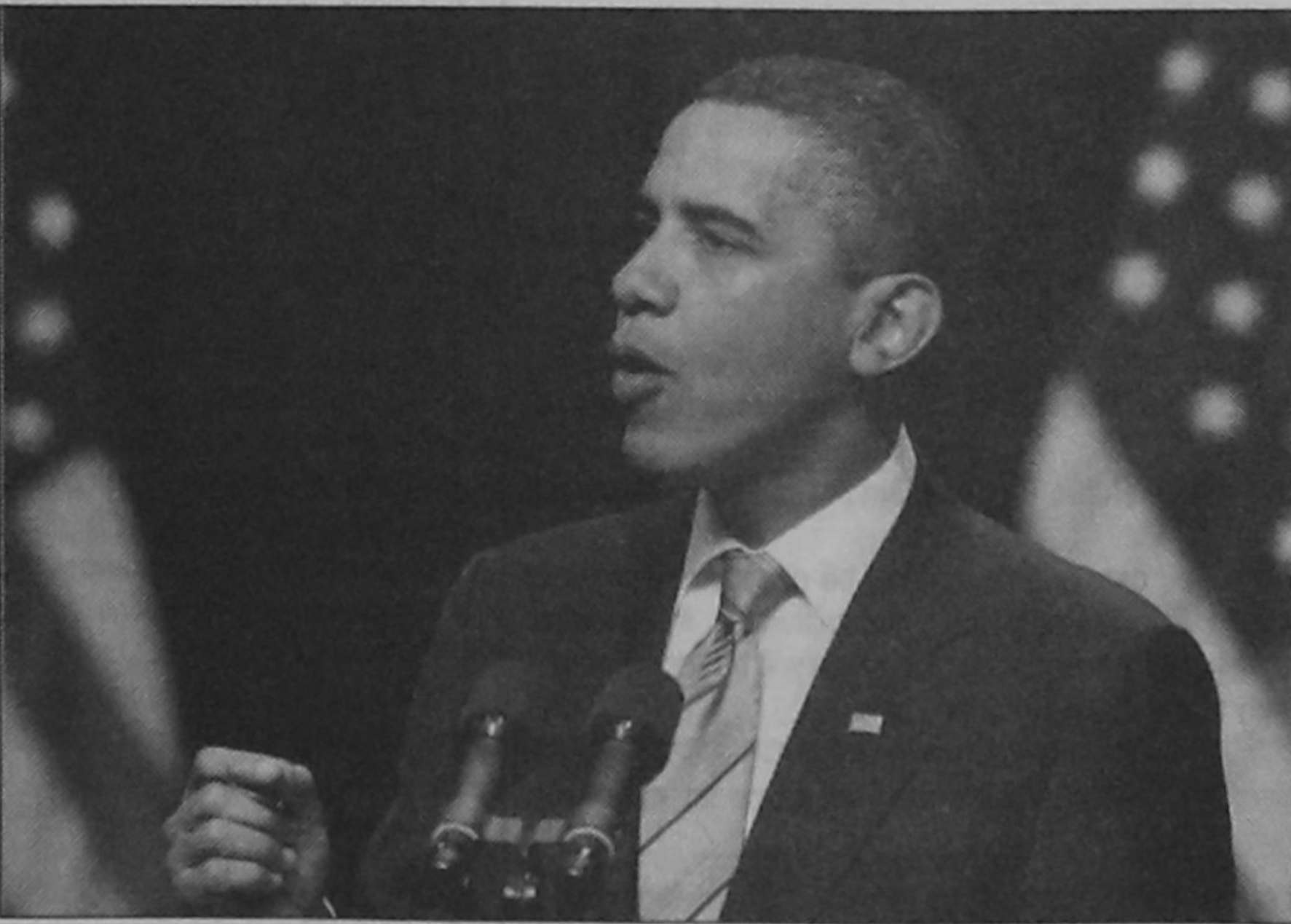
Obama started by courting the major interest groups, and so far none of them -- insurers, drug companies, hospitals, or doctors -- has come out against him.

He has repeatedly stated his flexibility and openness to compromise. Instead of proposing a plan, or even endorsing any specific policies, he has laid out eight broad principles -- universality, affordability, portability, quality, choice, prevention, fiscal sustainability, and financial protection -- and left the rest to Congress. His allies are outspending his opponents in the air war by 21.

Obama's major difficulties predictably derive from reacting too strongly against the Clinton model. Where Clinton went wrong by being too controlling, Obama has given up too much control. Leaving the specifics to Congress has led to a classic sausage-making festival.

Neutralising powerful interest groups has meant dropping sound policy ideas and neglecting essential cost controls. Putting the Democratic legislative barons in the driver's seat has undercut bipartisanship. Not having a specific plan has left Obama in the awkward position of lobbying for something that doesn't exist.

You can see a similar pendulum effect in foreign policy, where the object lesson is not Bill Clinton but George W. Bush. Obama, who did not have much global expertise before coming to office, molded



Do not play "follow the predecessor."

his approach around his predecessor's errors.

Bush's naive idealism and unilateralism encouraged Obama's realism and multilateralism. Bush's boycott of North Korea, Cuba, and Iran fed Obama's eagerness to engage pragmatically with those tyrannies. Bush's neglect of the Mideast peace process fed Obama's urge to plunge into it. The new

president has reversed the old one's prioritisation of Iraq over Afghanistan and, in what has become the political cliché of 2009, tried "hitting the reset button" on relations with Russia.

In so doing, Obama now faces an inverted set of hazards: getting overcommitted in Afghanistan, putting too much faith in the United Nations, accommodating dictators instead of standing up to them.

Surely, if not for Bush, Obama's instinct after the Iranian election would have been to side with those risking their lives to free their country; yet for many days he seemed more determined not to spoil his attempts at "dialogue" with Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

Is it possible to avoid this sort of oversteering? Perhaps the best one can hope for is a rapid shift from antithesis to Hegelian synthesis. And here, the agile Obama looks poised to do better than most. When he miscalculates, as he did in speaking too directly about the arrest of Henry Louis Gates Jr., he is quick to own his error. Instead of digging in, he starts digging out. On Iran, Obama belatedly spoke up for the "universal principle that people should have a voice in their own lives and their own destiny." On health care, he appears to be in the midst of reevaluating his approach.

The other factor that helps Obama is that his opponents are fighting the last war, too. Because obstructing "Hillarycare" worked for them politically in 1994, many Republicans seem to think that spiking "Obamacare" will play the same way the second time around. Even if they can, it won't.

Jacob Weisberg is author of *The Bush Tragedy*.

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