

Whose fault, Obama's or Maliki's?

STRANGER THAN FICTION



TAJ HASHMI

IT'S good news that within three weeks of ISIS (aka ISIL) takeover of Mosul, Tikrit and some other towns in northern Iraq, know-little analysts in the East and West have taken a break from their sensational speculations about the future

of Iraq and the entire region in the near future. However, the Fox TV channel and conservative print media in the US, along with Dick Cheney, John McCain and their likes, are exceptions in this regard. While neo-cons blame Obama for the crisis in Iraq, others point fingers at Prime Minister Maliki in this regard.

One retired US general told his interviewer on Fox TV last weekend that not only Iraq and the entire region but also America were going to face the ISIS-sponsored terrorist attacks "in months." We also hear that (a) Iraq is going to be fragmented into three entities -- the Kurdish north, Sunni central, and Shiite south -- and that (b) eventually an ISIS-led caliphate will transcend the entire region from Turkey to Iraq, and Egypt to Yemen, and beyond.

We have, however, no reasons to believe that Iraq is going to be divided into three independent entities. Although Iraqi Kurdistan will remain a totally autonomous sub-region, and will possibly control oil-rich Kirkuk as well, but an independent Kurdistan is not on the card as Turkey is not going to accept such an entity to the detriment of its own stability. It does not want its Kurdish minority to live in an autonomous territory. The so-called caliphate will never emerge as a reality.

Iraq has possibly the most blood-soaked history in the world since 680 AD. The killing of Hussein, grandson of Prophet Muhammad, by a rival claimant of the Caliphate at Karbala in Iraq sig-

naled the beginning of the Shia-Sunni conflict. However, the present sectarian conflict in Iraq and elsewhere are more geopolitical than religious by nature. Iraq went through brutal sectarian and tribal warfare, state and non-state-actors-sponsored terrorism and ethnic cleansing during the successive Umayyad and Abbasid caliphates (661-1258 AD). In 1258, Mongols destroyed Baghdad, killed tens of thousands of people, and signaled the end of the Abbasid Caliphate. Iraq suffered a lot under British occupation for decades following

scenario in Iraq may be divided into (at least) four schools. The first traces the present crisis in Iraq, Syria and adjoining states to the League of Nations' Mandate, which legitimised the Anglo-French occupation and division of Greater Syria and Iraq after World War I. The second holds the Bush-Cheney-Rumsfeld triumvirate responsible for destabilising the entire region by its unjustified invasion of Iraq in 2003. The third solely blames Iraq's Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki for his divisive sectarian policy, said to have alienated and antagonised Iraqi Sunnis

promised air attacks on Syria, and also failed to arm the "secular and liberal" Free Syrian Army to topple the Assad regime. They believe had Assad been removed by force, there would not have been any militant Islamist upsurge in Syria and Iraq. They also blame Obama for his "hurried" and complete withdrawal of US troops from Iraq. Interestingly, they do not blame Nouri al-Maliki, who did not want any US troop in Iraq beyond 2011.

There is yet another school of thought that attributes the crises in Syria and Iraq to Obama's support for raising the Saudi/Qatari-sponsored Jabhat-ul-Nusra and other Islamist militias to topple the Assad regime. Some reports reveal direct US involvement in arming and training the ISIS. Hillary Clinton once publicly stated that the US "unfortunately" had been supporting the "wrong people" to overthrow Assad. What was laughable was the way the White House recently told the Congress that the ISIS takeover of northern Iraq had caught it by surprise.

As Bush was responsible for the ongoing, post-invasion civil war in Iraq, so is Obama responsible for the messy situation in Syria, Iraq and the entire region. History has proven Bush wrong. Neither has the emergence of "a free Iraq" become a "watershed event in the global democratic revolution," nor has Obama been proven right that the Saudi-sponsored insurgency in Syria would stabilise the entire region. It is time that Obama admit ISIS fighters are his chickens, now roosting in Syria and Iraq. It seems, like Bush, he will be also remembered for his obtrusive foreign policy in the Muslim World. It is, however, altogether a different story if what Obama is doing to Syria, Iraq and Iran merely reflects the post-World War II US policy of making the Israeli, Saudi and its own Military-Industrial Complex happy, albeit to the detriment of freedom and human rights everywhere.

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World War I, Iraq's suffering did not end with the end of British rule. Tens of thousands of Iraqis got killed after the military takeovers between 1958 and the formal ascendancy of Saddam Hussein to power as a civilian autocrat in 1979. More than a million Iraqis have died since the US-led invasions of the country since 1991. More than 2,400 Iraqis got killed this June alone. One can only assume the turmoil in Iraq is not going to be over in months.

The proponents of the doomsday

to such an extent that they sided with the ISIS rebels, which led to the humiliating defeat of Iraqi soldiers. Several reports indicate that thanks to rampant corruption, cronyism and inefficiency of Maliki's generals, Iraqi troops failed to resist the handful of ISIS fighters as they had no water and food to sustain.

The hardcore Republicans, who represent the fourth group, squarely blame President Obama for the Syrian and Iraqi crises. They believe by listening to Vladimir Putin, Obama abandoned the

Refocusing on GSP

Making the right changes

FARHANA SYEAD

THE USTR review once again draws our attention towards Generalized System of Preferences (GSP). The recently published GSP Action Plan review and statements by US Trade Representative Michael Froman and our commerce minister remind us of the devastating shock of the deaths caused by the collapse of Rana Plaza. The US suspended Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) facility to Bangladesh and pressed for changes to address the worker rights and worker safety issues. There is a widespread debate regarding the importance of US GSP for Bangladesh. In this backdrop, let us go a little in-depth to understand the status of GSP in the context of Bangladesh.

GSP is a programme designed to promote economic growth in the developing world by providing preferential duty-free entry for up to 5,000 products. 170 underdeveloped and developing countries enjoy this trade benefit from the US (Office of the USTR). The GSP law requires the beneficiary country to satisfy certain conditions relating to labour rights. On July 2004, the Bangladesh government passed a bill allowing limited trade unionism in the EPZ's effective November 1, 2006. During the visit of the US Trade Representative to Bangladesh in late October 2009, Michael J. Delaney suggested that Bangladesh could increase its exports to US by utilising the revisions of GSP as it had been allowing the country to export certain goods since 2006.

According to the statistics of the Export Promotion Bureau (EPB), the total export of RMG to the US (as of June 2013) was around \$ 407.8 million. When the US decided to suspend the GSP status of Bangladesh, many people were outraged. However, it should be noted that only a few products used to enjoy the trade benefits under GSP. These include tobacco, sports equipment, porcelain china and plastic products. Even though the US GSP programme covers many products and thus benefits many developing countries, it unfortunately did not help Bangladesh much as it did not cover RMG items exported to the US. Rather, the US government has always charged a rather hefty tariff from Bangladesh and other countries' RMG export. In 2010, Bangladeshi RMG export faced a tariff of about \$ 650 million (which was about 17% of the total 2010 RMG export value).

Because a huge portion of Bangladesh's exports to the US consists of apparels that are not even part of the GSP system, it does not mean that Bangladesh does not need to regain its GSP status. While the immediate economic costs are not very significant, it carries reputational costs. Its "collateral damages" will hit Bangladesh hard. RMG exports from Bangladesh enjoy GSP privileges in EU, Canada, Japan and several other markets. If Bangladesh fails to meet the conditions stated in the USTR sponsored 16-point Bangladesh Action Plan 2013, it will send a bad signal to EU and other countries. Consequently, the latter may cancel the GSP privileges for export of RMG from Bangladesh. If this happens, it will be a disaster for Bangladesh.

According to the USTR review, the progress in some areas, such as completion of registration of approximately 120 new unions in the garment sector, dropping of pending criminal charges against labour activists, cooperating with the private sector initiatives on plans to inspect the thousands of garment factories, suspension of operations in about 20 factories found to be in imminent danger of structural failure or other catastrophic accident, is definitely praiseworthy. As a financially poor country, this progress means a lot for us. However, remaining behind schedule in carrying out many critical safety inspections in garment factories as well as meeting commitments to hire additional inspectors are still preventing us from regaining GSP status. These factors should be taken seriously to regain GSP status as well as our reputation in the global market.

A recent study by EXIM Bank found that despite the setback, Bangladesh has overtaken India in readymade garment exports. The RMG sector has become the lifeline of the Bangladesh economy and stands as the economic security of Bangladesh. It employs more than 4 million workers, 80% of whom are female. It is the largest foreign exchange earner of Bangladesh and second largest supplier of apparels in the US market after China. Thus, it is pertinent to say that Bangladesh needs to protect its leading position as supplier of apparel products in the global markets including the EU market. Bangladesh's immediate task is to meet the conditions stated in the USTR sponsored Bangladesh Action Plan 2013 to regain the suspended GSP privileges.

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Spate of violence against women

PARVEZ BABUL

BAGLADESH National Women Lawyers' Association (BNWL) published a report titled 'Violence against Women in Bangladesh' which reveals that five women are murdered every day in Bangladesh, while two more commit suicide due to violence against them! The report said that in 2012-13, 3,633 women were murdered and 1,196 committed suicide mostly due to domestic violence, rape and dowry-related violence. The report, however, showed that fewer violence related cases were reported in 2013 than the year before. Political violence overshadowed incidents of violence against women in newspaper reports.

Experts say that violence against women and girls does not discriminate between rich and poor. All the women and girls of the world are at risk. That is why we will have to make family, society, country as well as the world free from discrimination, negligence, and violence against women and girls; where all of the women and girls must be fully safe. Any incident of violence against women in any place of the world is totally unacceptable. There has to be 'zero tolerance' against violence, and it must be stopped.

Violence against women means crime against humanity. The existing systems and loopholes in law are encouraging violence against women. We, men and women together, must break the silence about this situation. Globally, every state must have time-appropriate, country-specific women development policy.

America-based 'Human Rights Watch 2013' mentioned that while Bangladesh has a strong set of laws to tackle violence against women, the implementation remains poor. Violence against women, including rape, dowry-related assaults, and other forms of domestic violence

such as acid attacks, sexual harassment, and illegal punishments in the name of 'fatwas' continue. The report added that international human rights law prohibits the subordination of people on the basis of not only race, ethnicity, religion, and political views, but also gender. That is, it prohibits forcing women to assume a submissive, secondary status, and similarly rejects a 'complementary' role for women as a substitute for gender equality.

Large numbers of women in Latin America and the Caribbean report sexual violence in their lifetime, perpetrated mostly by men known to them. The report noted that over the past 30 years, the international community has increasingly recognised violence against women as a public health problem, a violation of human rights, and a barrier to economic development.

These findings support a large body of global evidence that intimate partner violence is a public health problem with serious consequences for women's physical health, including physical injury, disability, and chronic pain. This comparative analysis also documented widespread emotional and mental health consequences of intimate partner violence, including fear, anxiety, depression, and suicidal thoughts. The report recommended that more research is needed to understand risk factors associated with violence against women. Surveys should follow international ethical and safety recommendations for researching violence against women.

Many Hindu people are of the opinion that Hindu marriage registration act must be mandatory instead of 'willingness' of the brides and grooms. Prof. Nirjan Adhikary of Dhaka University is in favour of mandatory Hindu marriage registration act. He described some facts of violence against Hindu women due to

non-registration of their marriages. Unfortunately, those women could not file any case against their husbands due to non-availability of legal documents.

Hindu marriage registration system must be made mandatory by law. He added that at the time of going abroad, it is difficult to get visa without marriage certificates. So, marriage registration will help Hindu women and men in many ways. Sharmila Chakraborty, a columnist, cultural activist and singer supported Professor Nirjan's statement and said: "It is the demand of time to make Hindu marriage registration act mandatory, because it is the right of both Hindu women and men."

Historical and impressive role of print, electronic and social media at home and abroad in preventing violence against women and protecting the interest of the victims must be recognised. Considering all these issues, we must say that media has more scope to cover more items on social mobilisation, including gender mainstreaming, gender equality, women's human rights and empowerment, and violence against girls and women. Changing 'negative mindset' of the people who treat women and girls 'negatively' must be a priority issue of discussions, Talk Shows, and debates in the print, electronic and social media.

In 2008, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon launched the global campaign called UNITE to End Violence against Women. It calls on governments, civil society, women's organisations, young people, the private sector, the media, and the entire United Nations system to support strategies to address violence against women and girls. That urged building of coalitions and networks of government and civil society institutions including media that can collaborate to develop and imple-

ment comprehensive approaches to addressing violence against women.

We should use community mobilisation and mass communication to achieve social change; work to transform whole institutions in every sector using a gender perspective in particular; integrate violence against women with sexual and reproductive health services; promote social and economic empowerment of women and girls; engage men and boys to promote nonviolence and gender equity; and provide early intervention services to at-risk families.

We need to bring about personal, familial, local, national, regional and internationally positive global change so that all the women of the world have equal rights like men to say 'yes' to what they like, and 'no' to what they dislike. It is the demand of the time. The governments, NGOs, civil society organisations, human and women rights defenders, and every single activist, should address the issue and join the fight against violence against women. Build awareness, teach morality, and orient male members of the family and society who do not know how to respect girls and women as human beings. Implement the existing laws effectively and provide legal assistance to the victims. Include resolve to stop violence against women issue in the election manifesto of the political parties.

Orientation workshops must be arranged for the students and teachers to prevent violence against women in all the educational institutions from primary to higher level. Above all, where there is violence against girls and women, there must be organised resistance by the united force of men, women, boys and girls.

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CROSSWORD by Thomas Joseph

ACROSS

- 1 Play groups
- 6 Like fresh lettuce
- 11 "... who lived in..."
- 12 Famed lover
- 13 Rose feature
- 14 Worked at home
- 15 Change the title of
- 17 Ball support
- 19 Diminish
- 20 Fourth-yr. students
- 23 Diamond stats
- 25 "Saint Joan"
- 26 Like calls from sea
- 28 Pucker-inducing
- 29 Ogled
- 30 Wrap up
- 31 Abel's mother
- 32 Before, to bards
- 33 Engine type
- 35 Swift
- 38 Opera pieces
- 41 Writer Walker
- 42 Fly features
- 43 Taxi part
- 44 Trap-shooting

DOWN

- 1 Purr producer
- 2 Tough wood
- 3 Coot or curlew
- 4 Went fast
- 5 Movie-maker Mack
- 6 Cake bit
- 7 Capital on the Tiber
- 8 Little devil
- 9 Spot
- 10 Okra unit
- 16 Free from blame
- 17 Refinement
- 18 Patriot Allen
- 20 Coast
- 21 Less well-done
- 22 Nobel, for one
- 24 Fitting
- 25 That lady
- 27 Play-ground sights
- 31 Down source
- 33 Cashino cubes
- 34 Composer Satie
- 35 Flock father
- 36 Pub stuff
- 37 Deep hole
- 39 Maturity
- 40 Retired plane

CRYPTOQUOTE

HGG ZSA QNAHZ ZSLUQZ HNA TLWBGA,
HUM WHUF PHU EA AJBNATTM LU H
TLUQGA OKNM: INAAMKW, RYTZLPA,
SKUKN, MYZF, WANPF, SKBA.
-- OLUTZKU PSYNPSLGG

Yesterday's CRYPTOQUOTE:
WINNERS MAKE A HABIT OF MANUFACTURING THEIR OWN
POSITIVE EXPECTATIONS IN ADVANCE OF THE EVENT.

BRIAN TRACY

6-26

Yesterday's answer

PROMO SAND
LEVEL JUROR
AMEND ELITE
CORD ROUSES
EVE TOP ESS
DEADHEAT
STAR RIMS
SPA WRY DUE
PARROT FIST
ADIEU MICAH
TREAT ADAGE
SELL POLER

A XYDLBAAXR IS
LONGFELLOW

One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

BEETLE BAILEY



by Mort Walker

QUOTABLE Quote
"Do not seek to follow in the footsteps of the wise. Seek what they sought." Matsuo Basho