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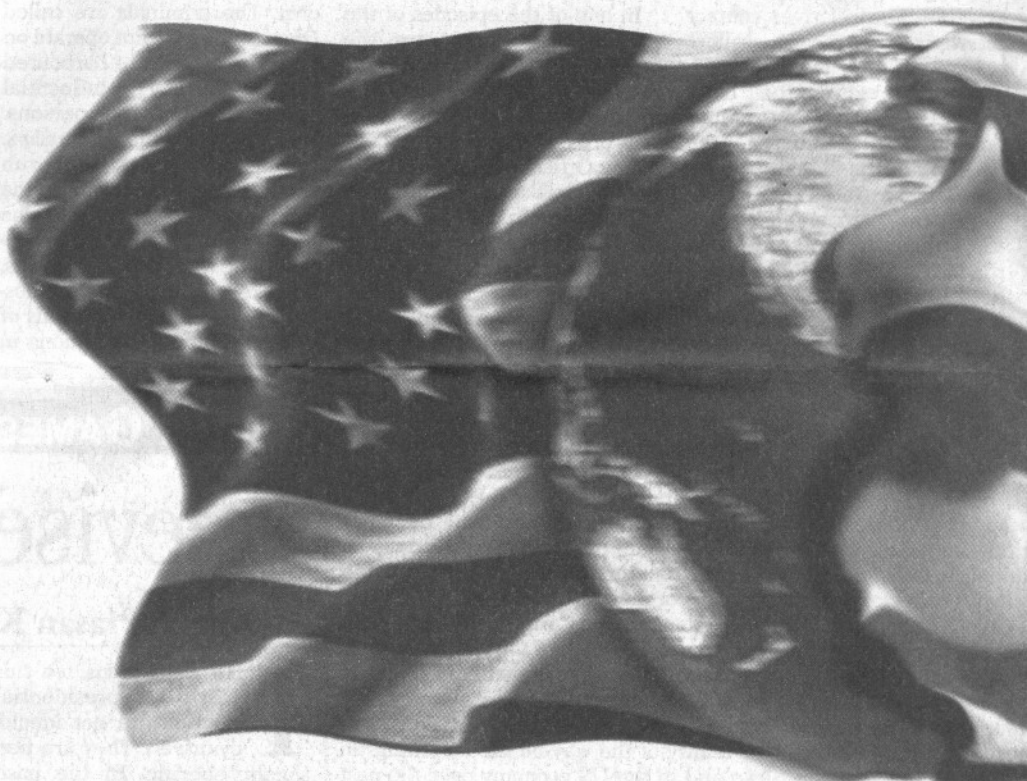
By Anwar Iqbal

USA

Dawn

31/10/04

With just two days to go, the world awaits with bated breath the outcome of US presidential elections to see who will don the colours of the global top cop. As things stand today, Bush will win if the voters focus on 9/11, while Kerry will have the advantage if bodybags from Iraq influence the mindset



THE 2004 presidential election in the United States is about 9/11 and the war in Iraq, with domestic issues such as economy, unemployment, health and social security are a distant second.

While the Bush administration wants Americans to think of the terror attacks of September 11, 2001, and reelect President George W. Bush, the Democrats urge the people to think also of the other war in Iraq and remove Mr Bush from the White House.

The general consensus is that if the voters go to the polling stations still thinking about that morning three years ago when a group of terrorists brought down the towers of the World Trade Center in New York and killed more than 3,000 people, Mr Bush will win. If the Democrats succeed in making the voters shift their focus to Iraq, Senator John F. Kerry will occupy the White House for the next four years.

Although only two days are left to the election, it is still not clear which of the two events, 9/11 or the US invasion of Iraq, will have a greater pull on the voter. But the Bush administration has one clear advantage, the entire America

Quotable quotes

"I am the best candidate to keep America safe," said George Bush.

Asked whether he has considered the fact that he could lose, Bush replied, "I am not there yet. I believe we are going to win and I am campaigning as if we are going to win."



"The unbelievable blindness, stubbornness, arrogance of this administration to do the basics have now allowed this president to once again fail the test of being the commander in chief," Senator Kerry told an election rally. "We need a president to bring America together. We really do," he thundered.

"I think this is really one of the most difficult elections to call that I have ever seen," said former President



But the Bush administration's media managers did not let this happen. Mr Kerry and his supporters now have to use their persuasive powers to convince the Americans that they need to remove Mr Bush to stop the war in Iraq.

To do so, Mr Kerry has to rely on statistics. And with the US death toll now close to 1,100, many Americans are willing to listen. According to some estimates, as many as 8,000 Americans have so far been injured in Iraq and thousands more are also suffering from the postwar trauma.

The Kerry campaign is using some of the injured in its advertisements to convey the message home. But what the Bush administration fears most is a brief announcement, made quietly by the US Department of Defence.

The brief note, issued several times a day by the Pentagon, announces the names of US soldiers killed or wounded in Iraq. Seven such notices were issued on a single day this week, giving out the names of US soldiers killed recently. "The Department of Defence announced today the death of two soldiers supporting Operation Iraqi Freedom," said one announcement. "They died on October 13, in Mosul when an improvised explosive

The betting scene

A LEADING offshore gaming has been offering odds on the 2004 US presidential election since the start of the year. President Bush's odds have seen a backing of bettors as he is now reelected at 1/2 (which is, win \$1 for every \$2 bet). John Kerry defeating the incumbent is at 1/1 (which is, win \$1 for every \$1 bet). Kerry as the 10/13 favourite.

The BetWWTS.com has also offered odds on the winning margin of each candidate. The odds that Bush will win by a margin of seven electoral votes stand at 8/1. Kerry taking the presidency by the same margin is at 10/1. Bush is listed at 7/1 odds to win by a margin of 57 to 65 electoral votes, but he is a 30/1 longshot to win by a margin of 57 to 65 electoral votes, while being a 21/1 favourite to win by a margin of 57 to 65 votes. — *By Anwar Iqbal*

J. Burgess, 24, of Landaff, New Hampshire, who died on October 15 in Mosul when a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device detonated near his patrol vehicle.

David L. Waters, 19, of Auburn, California, died on October 14 in Baghdad when an improvised explosive device detonated near his convoy vehicle.

Specialist Josiah H. Vandertulip, 21, of Irving, Texas, died on October 14 in Baghdad when his dismounted patrol came under enemy fire.

advantage, the entire America has seen and remembers the image of 9/11, but few have seen the coffins coming from Iraq.

Had the administration allowed the US media to picture the coffins of the US soldiers from their arrival at a military base in Delaware to their burials across America, this election would not have been as close as it is today. The coffins would have definitely turned the Americans against the war, encouraging them to remove the regime that led these soldiers to Iraq.

seen," said former President Bill Clinton.



"Turn all of that energy and all of these feelings into a nonstop effort between now and the time the polls close at 7pm on November 2," said former Vice-President Al Gore. "If anybody ever tells you that one vote doesn't count, you tell them to come talk to me."

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One of them was Lt-Col Mark P. Phelan, 44, of Green Lane, Pennsylvania. Col Phelan was assigned to the Army Reserve's 416th Civil Affairs Battalion. The other soldier, Major Charles R. Soltes, Jr., 36, was from Irvine, California. Major Soltes was assigned to the Army Reserve's 426th Civil Affairs Battalion.

The third soldier, whose death was confirmed this weekend, was Specialist Alan

Baghdad when his dismounted patrol came under enemy fire. Lance Cpl. Brian K. Schramm, 22, of Rochester, New York, died on October 15 in Babil.

One notice announced the death of three soldiers, all in attacks by Iraqi insurgents. Captain Dennis L. Pintor, 30, of Lima, Ohio, died on October 12. Spc. Michael S. Weger, 30, of Rochester, N.Y., died on October 12. Spc. Jaime Moreno, 28, of Round Lake Beach, Ill., died on October 13 of injuries sustained a day earlier.

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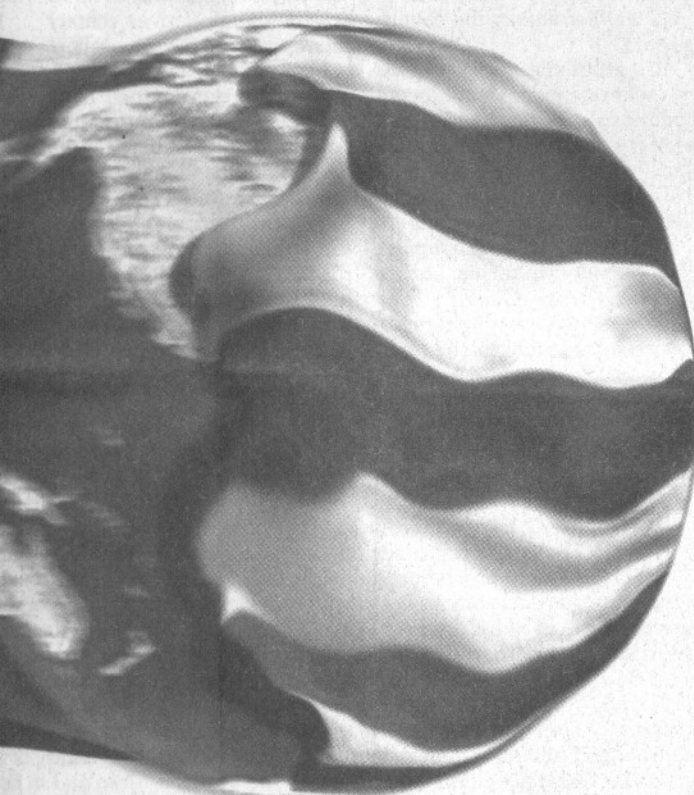


Illustration by Huzaifa Younus

There are some 300 million Arabs in 22 separate countries and 1.2 billion Muslims around the world, and not many of them live in democracies. Malaysia is the outstanding exception, but Bangladesh, Mali and Senegal come close, and Morocco, Jordan, Qatar, Oman and Bahrain are clearly on the right track — and maybe we can now add Afghanistan to their ranks.

But given the difficulties that the Bush administration is facing in bringing stability to Iraq, one relatively small Arab country of 25 million people, critics say that his grand goal of democratizing the Middle East is just too visionary to be realistic. Bear in mind that Mr Bush has said repeatedly, both in his speech last year to the National Endowment for Democracy where he first laid out the master plan for defeating terrorism by changing the Middle East, and again in his State of the Union address this year, that this is not a task for one or even two presidencies but “a challenge for our generation”.

Just as the World War generation of Americans took off their uniforms in 1945 and buckled down to five decades of further struggle in the Cold War, the Bush administration is calling the next generation to a similar decades-long mission. And Mr Bush's supporters argue that the only way to defeat religious extremism is to establish a democratic and prosperous Islamic world.

The problem is that there is no way to know before November 2 if the American trust Mr Bush's vision. But there are others who argue that it is equally difficult to see if the Americans are willing to trust Mr Kerry.

If opinion polls are to be believed, half the nation is passionately for Mr Bush, and half passionately for Mr Kerry — at least, passionately against Mr Bush. And neither candidate seems strong enough

The betting scene

A LEADING offshore gaming company, BetWWTS.com has been offering odds on the 2004 presidential election since the start of the year. President Bush appears to have the backing of bettors as he is now the odds-on favourite to be reelected at 1/2 (which is, win \$1 for every \$2 bet). The odds of John Kerry defeating the incumbent currently stand at 3/2 odds — a drop from August 7, when BetWWTS.com listed Kerry as the 10/13 favourite.

The BetWWTS.com has also created a number of betting options on the winning margin of victory by electoral votes for each candidate. The odds that Bush wins re-election by one to seven electoral votes stand at 8/1, while the odds that Kerry captures the presidency by the same margin are at 12/1. President Bush is listed at 7/1 odds to win by either 8 to 14 or 15 to 21 electoral votes, but he is a 30/1 long-shot to emerge victorious by a margin of 57 to 65 electoral votes. Meanwhile, Kerry has been installed at 10/1 odds to win by a margin of either 8 to 14 or 15 to 21 electoral votes, while being 40/1 to take the presidency by 57 to 65 votes. — *By Anwar Iqbal*

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ing a large number of Americans that the war in Iraq cannot be won militarily. Is this number large enough to ensure a victory for Mr Kerry will not be known until the votes are counted and results announced.

The Bush campaign, on the other hand, is trying to convince the Americans that the president does have a vision not only for a US success in Iraq, but also for resolving some of the major disputes that the terrorists use for recruiting Muslim youths for their cause.

While some dispute the claim that Mr Bush has a vision for setting things rights, others say that he may have a vision, but he definitely lacks the prudence to implement it.

For instance, his grand strategy to bring about the modernization and eventually the democratization of the Middle East is breathtaking in its ambition. This is not just nation-building, but the reformation of a religion and the transformation of an entire culture.

Mr Bush. And neither candidate seems strong enough to win over a decisive chunk of voters from the other half.

As *Washington Post* pointed out while endorsing Mr Kerry for president earlier this week, if there's much to criticize in Mr Bush's term, there are also more than a few things to admire. Similarly, if there's much to admire in Mr Kerry, there are also things that "give us a pause."

President Bush did succeed in rallying his nation after 9/11, and reshaped his own world view. His commitment to a long-term struggle to promote freedom in the Arab world reflects an understanding of the deep threat posed by religious extremism. But, as the *Post* pointed out, his actions have not always matched his stirring rhetoric on the subject, and setbacks to democracy in other parts of the world, notably Russia, appear not to have troubled him much.

He also succeeded in forming a large alliance in the fight against terrorism, particularly in the Muslim world.

The Bush administration ousted the Taliban from Afghanistan and destroyed what it believed was Al Qaeda's headquarter and its bases in Afghanistan. It also broke up Al Qaeda's international network, disintegrating it into small cells with no central leadership.

In Iraq, he succeeded in ousting Saddam Hussein, but, as Mr Kerry pointed out during presidential debates, Mr Bush does not seem to have the plan to win peace. His failure to form a larger alliance of nations for the war in Iraq and his inability to foresee the difficulties the US faced there led the US troops to the quagmire that they find themselves in today.

As the *Post* points out, the Bush administration's disregard for the Geneva Conventions led to a prison-torture scandal in both Iraq and Afghanistan that has diminished America's image and influence abroad. In much of the world, in fact, US prestige is at a historic low, partly

because of Mr Bush's high-handed approach to allies on issues ranging far beyond Iraq.

"These failings have a common source in Mr Bush's cocksureness, his failure to seek advice from anyone *outside* a narrow circle and his unwillingness to expect the unexpected or adapt to new facts," notes the *Post*.

"These are dangerous traits in any president, but especially in a wartime leader. They are matched by his failure to admit his errors or to hold senior officials accountable for theirs," the newspaper adds.

On the domestic side, Mr Bush is accused of following a reckless fiscal policy. Critics say that Mr Bush inherited a budget in surplus and drove the deficit to record levels with tax cuts that were inefficient in providing economic stimulus and that were tilted toward the wealthy. They argue that while the war on terror and the stock market collapse were beyond his control, his invasion of Iraq

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