

Wars of the 21st century

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By M.P. Bhandara

WRITING in these columns on March 30, 2003 on the Iraq war, I had said: "It is a strange war. The victor is destined to be the loser; the defeated are likely to bask in the halo of victory. How do we explain this paradox? The Iraq war was unleashed on the premise that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction (WMD). But what if these alleged weapons are never used or discovered by the Anglo-American invaders? What if Saddam's secret weapon is urban guerilla fighting? It makes good strategy from his point of view to hit the enemy's Achilles' heel."

Sadly, the above prediction is not far off the mark. We now learn from a number of authentic sources including the Downing Street cabinet leak, that President Bush was 'gung-ho' to wage war on Saddam within three months of 9/11.

The article concluded with the remarks: "If no WMD is found, Bush and Blair will some day — yes some day — be arraigned for waging war on presumptive or speculative grounds."

It is unlikely that Bush and Blair will ever be tried in a formal court. But in the court of public opinion, they are held guilty of inflicting a needless war. But, instead of admitting a mistake and apologizing to the Iraqi nation and quitting Iraq, they have chosen to forget the cause of going to war in the first place. As an afterthought, a new war

Suez Canal to Egypt.

Take Marshall Plan, which was responsible for the economic revival of Europe after World War-II. Perhaps the classic case of great power restraint was its patient engagement of the Soviet Union in the cold war period (1946-1990). The US exercised restraint when the Soviet tanks invaded Berlin, Warsaw, Budapest and Prague following the enlightened foreign policies of statesman like George Kennan. It provided the Soviets the incentive to moderate their behaviour.

Vietnam was the beginning of America's misadventures in foreign lands, culminating in the Iraq war. Post-9/11 America has started redefining itself in an aggressive way. To quote again from my previous column: "And Mr Bush Jr. — the red neck of Texas — will be long remembered for fanning the so-called "civilizational conflict", has

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down strict parameters of conduct, it absolutely forbids suicide. None of these conditions are even remotely met by the warriors of this invisible army. Islam apparently is a smokescreen for something else — a means to an end and not an end itself.

Next some people think that given a withdrawal by the US and its allies from Iraq, Afghanistan and an equitable resolution of the Palestine conflict, this invisible war will come to an end. They may yet be mistaken. I quote here Oliver Roy, the distinguished French scholar of Islam and author of "Globalized Islam":-

"First, let's consider the chronology. The Americans went to Iraq and Afghanistan after September 11, not before. Mohammed Atta and the other pilots were not driven by Iraq or Afghanistan. Were they then driven by the plight of the Palestinians? It seems unlikely.

After all, the attack was plotted well before the second intifada began in September 2000, at a time of relative optimism in Israeli-Palestinian negotiations....

"Abdullah Azzam, Osama bin Laden's mentor, gave up supporting the Palestinian Liberation Organization long before his death in 1989 because he felt that to fight for a localized political cause was to forsake the real jihad, which he felt should be international and religious in character.

"From the beginning, Al Qaeda's fighters were global jihadists, and their favoured battlegrounds have been outside the Middle East: Afghanistan, Bosnia, Chechnya and Kashmir. For them, every conflict is simply a part of the western encroachment on the Muslim ummah, the worldwide community of

to win in the first place. As an afterthought, a new war aim has been invented: Freedom for the hapless Iraqis. Freedom is supposed to arrive after the Americans slaughter the Iraqis and the Iraqis slaughter one another. Never mind North Korea with its proven WMDs and a dictatorship worse than Saddam's, is being courted at six-party nuclear talks in with a heavy load of goodies in train.

In the meantime, the querulous framers of the Iraqi constitution are all agreed on one basic matter: liberal rights granted to women by Saddam Hussein be abstracted in the name of Shariat. An Iranian-style regime is promised to the women of Iraq. Three cheers for the liberation of Iraq!

An epistemological question arises: what is freedom? Apparently each culture has its own concept of freedom.

Pondering the consequences of war in Iraq and the US behaviour towards enemy combatants, it seems that they are determined to bring about a 'clash of civilizations'. The exit of America from Iraq — whenever it takes place — is likely to be as traumatic as America's exit from Vietnam. In this nasty war the last laugh may well belong to Iran. The allies of the US in Iraq are the Shias, who are united under the spiritual leadership of Ayatollah Sistani, who draws his temporal inspiration from the Islamic Republic of Iran — the current beta noire of the US. In effect the US is fighting Iran's war in Iraq — or so it seems.

In the process of unleashing a thoughtless war and stirring a hornet's nest, Mr Bush has altered the character and concept of America that we once knew. The United States was the cradle of democratic freedoms, the pillar of civil society and the champion of anti-colonialism. It was Roosevelt who more or less bullied Churchill into granting freedom to British India. Without Roosevelt's prodding India and Pakistan in all likelihood would not have achieved independence in 1947. Take the Suez War. It was America's reluctance to back the aggression of Britain and France which handed the sovereignty of the

introduced a new political category: democratic fascism. "

Not known previously were the atrocities perpetrated by the US on Arab and Afghan prisoners. An editorial of July 21, 2005, appearing in the *International Herald Tribune* under the heading 'The Women of Guantanamo' is revealing; yesterday's champion of human rights has invented a unique form of cultural torture.

"... Surely no one can approve turning an American soldier into a pseudo-lap-dancer or having another smear fake menstrual blood on an Arab man. These practices are as degrading to the women as they are to the prisoners. They violate American moral values — and they seem pointless.

"Does anyone in the military believe that a coldblooded terrorist who has withstood months of physical and psychological abuse will crack because a woman runs her fingers through his hair suggestively or watches him disrobe? If devout Muslims become terrorists because they believe western civilization is depraved, does it make sense to try to unnerve them by having western women behave like trollops?... There were several instances when female soldiers rubbed up against prisoners and touched them inappropriately... began to enter the personal space of the subject, touched him and whispered in his ear. "

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We need to analyse trying to understand this strange phenomenon which seems to be the future of wars in the 21st century. It is certainly not jihad or a holy war pitting Muslims against non-Muslims. Islam expressly forbids the killing of Muslims or non-combatants of any faith. Jihad lays

believers.

"Second, if the conflicts in Afghanistan, Iraq and Palestine are at the core of the radicalization, why are there virtually no Afghans, Iraqis or Palestinians among the terrorists? Rather, the bombers are mostly from the Arabian Peninsula, North Africa, Egypt and Pakistan — or they are Western-born converts to Islam."

If Islam is just the flag of these invisible warriors and if the involvement of suicide warriors and their motives lies outside the current wars in Muslim lands, what then are the real objectives of the globalized war instigated by Osama bin Laden? To my mind, it is an audacious attempt at world domination. The only route to world domination lies in securing Saudi Arabia (Osama's homeland) and its prolific reservoirs of black gold. To secure this objective is to pit the ummah from the jungles of Indonesia to the sands of Morocco against the west. The purpose is to consolidate the ummah and divide the West. Talibanism, Afghanistan, Palestine and Iraq are merely side shows which serve as a useful launching pad.

In modern times, there have been historical actors with not only the vision but the will and the means to dominate the world. Such was the determination of Napoleon and Hitler. But a comparison of Osama bin Laden with them is inappropriate. The chosen means is not arms but ideology based on a religious cliff. A more appropriate comparison would be with Marx, no matter how absurd this may appear. Marx rose out of his 19th century grave to dominate with ideology China, Russia and very large parts of Europe and South America. Marxism was the religion of the world in much of the 20th century and gave birth to a fanaticism much like what we see today.

If we are to come to terms with Osama and this new global invisible war, we must know what his ultimate objectives are.

The writer is a member of the National Assembly. E-mail: murbr@isb.paknet.com.pk