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Iraq redux?

A hundred beats

By Fatima Bhutto

Wither Iraqi style democracy? According to a very ominous cover story in Newsweek, it's here in Pakistan. Newsweek is confident in asserting that 'today no other country on earth is arguably more dangerous than Pakistan'. Not even Iraq. In fact, according to Newsweek Iraq is so 2006, Pakistan is it now; we're the new black. We've managed to kick Iraq off the pages as the world's most horrifying, most destructively precarious country and reclaim the title for ourselves. According to the Newsweek article, Pakistan has 'everything Osama Bin Laden could ask for' including a vibrant jihadi movement, political instability, access to worrisome weaponry, and a lonesome nuclear bomb. The article quotes a now deceased Taliban commander as romantically noting that 'Pakistan is like your shoulder that supports your RPG'. It is swoon worthy stuff really.

While the Newsweek article is no doubt an excited piece of fear mongering journalism, is it actually so far off the mark? Not really. We have recently been brought Iraqi style democracy by a formerly self-exiled political dynamo (remember to say thank you). Our nascent 'democracy' has been shipped over to Pakistan at the behest of delightful Neo-Con masters -- George W. Bush et al. -- and is complete with letters from the United States Senate and phone calls from Condi. If this isn't enough to strike you as eerily familiar, there's more.

Like our own harbinger of 'democracy', Iyad Allawi, the American choice for Iraq's post occupation Prime Minister, was deftly assisted by a Republican lobbying firm in Washington D.C. Allawi's firm spent \$340,000 in their campaign to push him as the people's Prime Minister. How much did the Daughter of the East (read: West) spend on her campaign for a glorious return? Democracy does nothing if not advocate transparency and accountability of its public servants, but not in Pakistan where we are a step above the rest thanks to the fact that our criminals are cloaked by the National Reconciliation Ordinance.

Similar to Iraq's foray into Neo-Con democracy, ours has kicked off with a spate of portentous violence. One hundred and forty dead? No problem. That's called collateral damage. They died for democracy, just like the estimated 655,000 dead Iraqis did. As Mistress Condi would say, these are the birthing pangs of democracy. Our Iraqi style democracy will be bloody, but we're being heralded into a new era. That should be a comfort to us. Before we go silently into this good night, it's worth taking a look at our predecessor. Let's spend a moment imagining just how spectacular our Iraqi style democratic landscape is going to be.

The corruption that plagued the Iraqi occupation will be no problem for Pakistan. The US led provisional Authorities, headed by Paul Bremer, managed to 'lose' \$8.8 billion dollars worth of

funds meted out by the US government by the time they handed power over to a 'democratic' Iraqi government. The Iraqi Central Bank also faced a mysterious cash shortage as millions of dollars disappeared from its vaults. Allawi's government, in time, managed to drain one fund of \$600 million dollars, leaving no paperwork behind. What amateurs these Iraqis are. We're set. We have the NRO; there will be no money troubles in Pakistan, the new Iraq.

Poverty? We have that in spades. Figures from 2006 place eight million Iraqis as living on less than \$1 a day. Almost 70 per cent of Iraqis are unemployed thanks to Neo Liberal shock therapy economics and some 96 per cent of Iraq's population depends on food rations. In Pakistan we don't have food rations for our poor, we let them starve. Note to self, we'll have to get on that.

Underdevelopment is also something we Pakistanis will beat Iraq at. Who does Newsweek think they're kidding? We've long been worse than Iraq and our successive governments continually pride themselves on doing absolutely nothing about it. More than 500,000 residents of Baghdad are deprived of running water and when they do have access to it, it's not potable due to the fact that 65 per cent of Iraq's water plants have been subject to leaks and sewage contamination. These figures, largely from US Foreign Relations Committee hearings and other independent American sources, offer proof of America's wanton destruction of Iraq. Pre-war Saddam era figures don't even come close.

Households in Baghdad receive on average only two to six hours of electricity a day, largely due to the collapse of Iraq's supply grid after the invasion. Prior to March 2003, Iraq's total power generation was around 4,300 megawatts, after Operation Iraqi Freedom it dropped to 3,700 megawatts. Isn't Neo-Con democracy wonderful? We have so much to look forward to.

A United Nations study of 2005 found that one third of Iraqi children suffer from malnourishment, whereas an Iraqi Health Ministry study of the previous year found that 'easily treatable conditions such as diarrhea' account for 70 per cent of deaths among children. We can match those figures, those brutal figures, and we don't even have a large-scale war going on. Baghdad has nothing on Karachi -- the many million residents of Lyari are routinely denied access to water and electricity. Households across this city in Malir, Ibrahim Hyderi, and Saddar -- you name it -- have always been deprived of these basic rights and not by occupational governments, but by our own 'elected' representatives. Tragically, we choose the very men and women who keep our city's neighborhoods entrenched in poverty. We vote for them. We'll probably vote them in again in 2008. As voters, we Pakistanis are either incredibly forgiving or monumentally stupid.

When Pakistan enjoys the same democracy that Iraq does -- and you know certain people are hanging their careers on this happening -- we won't even need-hired armies like Blackwater to come in. Our police out-Blackwater Blackwater. They already behave like private mercenary forces, for hire wherever power and money call them. They do not protect and serve, no, not our police force. They are the protected and they serve only their own interests. Police brutality in Pakistan has raged for many years; Iraqi style democracy won't tame our vigilante cops, only empower them.

The violence is building, it's getting bloodier. Rawalpindi, Dera Bugti, Wana and that's only in the past week. Look at Swat. Once known for its beautiful Buddhist ruins and idyllic Northern beauty, it has been consumed by death and ruin. Just as Najaf and Karbala were overcome, just as Fallujah and Mosul were earmarked for destruction, so has Swat been. And what about those left behind? The victims of this rising violence? Like Cindy Sheehan, the courageous mother who followed President Bush all over the country holding a vigil for her son Casey, killed in the unjust Iraq war, we have our own mothers, wives, and sisters sitting Shiva outside government offices protesting the disappearance of their loved ones. Newsweek was not prescient; truthfully, they're a little late to the party.