

A BIG IF THAT MATTERS BIG TODAY

IF ROSS PEROT MAKES POLITICAL FORTUNE
GEORGE BUSH WILL MAKE HISTORY IN REVERSE
BUT WHAT WILL THE AMERICANS MAKE OUT OF THE MESS?

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CASE IN POINT

From



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Washington

THE CAN'T DO PRESIDENT

Who would have foreseen all this just a year ago in the summer of 1991?

HE was the most experienced.
He was the most resolute.
He was the most firm.
He was the most powerful.
He was the most victorious.
He was the most popular.
He was all that combined only a year ago.
President George Bush was unique then.
President George Bush cuts a lonely figure now.
His trusted advisers now say that "a very strong anti-incumbent fervour" is not limited to the United States; "it's much broader than the United States".



BUSH: *Feebly Powerful*



PEROT: *Asimovian Mule*



CLINTON: *Also Ran*

"The whole world is in a funk", according to Clayton Yeutter, white House counsellor of domestic affairs and former chairman of President Bush's Republican national committee.
How and why did the unthinkable happen is a mystery that is extremely frustrating to the statesman who, until recently, had nothing but successes to his credit since becoming what they call the most powerful man on earth in the world's most powerful nation.
He sent his troops to a country like Panama to rid it of a dictator. He freed Nicaragua from the clutches of communism. He ranged a global coalition of almost a million enlisted men and women, stockpiled the most sophisticated weapons and the largest quantity of explosives ever used in the world since man inhabited this planet, so as to lead the world to defeat another dictator. He claimed singularly to have wiped out communism and make the greatest adversary of civilisation — the Soviet Union — disappear from the face of the earth like a molehill.
Then the president went seeking re-election on the strength of all the above qualifications, with a steely confidence

have been brought home to America's living rooms where the viewers see how weak their president appears in foreign lands, policy about which his supporters have been describing as his forte.
In Tokyo, the president of the United States collapsed into the arms of an embarrassed host prime minister during a party which was free of oppressive demands of international politics heavily laced with economy. Then on Thursday, the same president was greeted with hundreds of Panamanian demonstrators who not only refused to give an intent ear to Bush's speech but forced his security guards to hurriedly whisk him away, with Barbara Bush, pro-American Panamanian President Guillermo Endara — who assumed power after the 1989 US invasion that ousted president Manuel Antonio Noriega — and his wife Anna Mae, to an undetermined destination, even as loud bursts of teargas canisters being fired continued echoing across the podium overlooking hundreds of tear-gassed people, weeping, choking, scattered around a downtown plaza.
No American has savoured this scene in the neighbouring tiny Panama, as they

appears in the undeclared candidacy of Ross H Perot.
Bush's supposed main rival, Bill Clinton of the Democratic Party, has certainly not shown enough political intelligence to cash in on these fatal blunders of the Republican runner. He did not offer any new solution and that is why when compared to Perot, according to the latest opinion polls, Clinton himself is regarded by the voters as another also-ran in the presidential race.
It will be a history-making event if candidates of both the major parties, one of whom an incumbent president, are defeated by a third, unparty contender. To unmake the president and make history, Perot, like an American freestyle wrestler, is repeatedly crashing blows at the point where it pains most: where the president is retreating fast and exposing his weakness the greatest.
To appear as a "man with a programme", Perot thrilled the Americans when he said he would run the US like the manager of a huge multinational corporation. His remarkable business achievements qualify him in the public eyes for such adventure at national plain. He electrified the American imagination

peeling and more popular than the frontrunners of the two major parties that have been alternating since ages? There must be some deficiency inspite of the open chance that a new, third party can emerge any time in the country, provided the nation needs it, provided the nation wants to replace one party with a new one, provided the nation isn't happy with the leadership offered by the existing parties.
The last is the most important in today's situation. It is leadership that the United States needs most today. Without casting reflections on the quality of leadership provided by George Bush, the fact of the matter is that the people did not buy the US victories in Panama and Iraq as America's grand victories. President Bush tried to sell them as such; but when on Thursday he was disallowed by an enraged public to speak in Panama City, and when they saw that unlike a vanquished Japan, a vanquished Iraq was permitted by the US to remain a dictatorship, the people of America thought they stood vindicated. Such instances did not provide proof of leadership.
Moreover, the haphazard policies that President Bush started to discuss in public so as to regain some of the lost popularity of last year, have been generally taken as election ploys and political gimmicks.
One such ploy was the proposal for balanced budgets. Congress did not approve a constitutional amendment for it. Debts as enormous as \$4 trillion are to be repaid by an America whose deficit is going to be as high as \$400 billion this year alone. Certainly, Bush is not the one man responsible for all the deficit and debt. However, the two figures have enlarged during his presidency and that is where the American people are seeking

ALL of a sudden the American commander-in-chief, the same man who led the American Armada into battle in the Mid-east a bit earlier in his first term as president — after two full terms as vice president it should always be remembered as well as more training in more key positions than probably any president ever before him — has become the "Can't Do" President.
Well, actually, it's not all of a sudden. It's been creeping up on him for quite some months. Indeed, George Bush has been in a kind of political free-fall just about ever since his much-hyped "victory" over the much overrated forces of Saddam Hussein.
It's just that events of the past few days have considerably highlighted and dramatically underscored that President George Bush may well be in for early retirement. And even if he were to emerge victorious in November it is likely he would be a rather crippled president during any second term.
Washington buzzes with criticism of the president's chief of staff, Samuel Skinner, and those on down the chain of political command. But the basic reality is that George Bush has always been a pragmatic politician seriously standing for little in terms of principles and hardly arousing passion except from the bureaucracy, the special interests, the CIA, the military, and the complex of business interests that intersect all of these — all of whom understandably want one of their own in the job and have found in Bush just that kind of a guy.
Looked at in this way it's easier to understand how this kind of president can find himself in such serious trouble in this new era of populism

Perot.
The bottomline these days, of course, is that a huge percentage of Americans simply doesn't approve of the Bush presidency, want a change one way or another, and is giving every impression that people simply want to quite literally "throw the bums out" and try someone new.
And of course both Bill Clinton and Ross Perot are daily in the ring vying for the mantle of newness, change, and the "can do" image that Bush has squandered.
Simply said, George Bush has been in a political free-fall, a political melt-down of historic dimensions. The only reason it won't last is that Bush has already fallen about as far as he can go. In approval rating he's already below what many had thought to be his hard-core support level, which explains how the vice president is conducting himself these days.
Well aware that the three-way race is now upon them and that they are haemorrhaging the most not to the traditional but loyal enemy, the Democrats, but to virgin politician Perot, Quayle has drawn the job — which he obviously relishes —

earth like a molehill. Then the president went seeking reelection on the strength of all the above qualifications, with a steely confidence that he would outpoll Richard Nixon's 520 electoral votes 20 years ago and Franklin Roosevelt's 523 in 1936.

And then the president stumbled on a peanut. The National economy betrayed George Bush. The issue emerged out of nowhere. The economy at the beginning of the 1992 presidential campaign was as bad as under the presidency of the Great Communicator, or as good as at the time of America's most experienced political wizard.

Before embarking on a journey of lifetime to Rio de Janeiro to face a more antagonistic world than it ever was when Moscow ruled the roost in the South, the "Environmental President" announced that the US would "stand alone" against the biodiversity treaty. Back home the frustrated president of the United States already stands alone.

American analysts had been singing praises for the president until the Madrid talks to openly bring Arabs for the first time at the same table with Israelis, and until he stepped on the tail of the cat by denying \$10 billion loan guarantees to Israel. Suddenly all of the analysts turned against him for no apparent fault of their erstwhile hero. Contrary to expectations of some piously wishing Americans, the refusal of loan guarantees to Israel meant — or was made to mean — that the American economy was surely in doldrums, and a president who could not prove that the economy was enjoying good health by giving whatever Israel demanded was the right person to be accused of bringing the country to such a sorry pass.

Since then, a media-hounded Bush is making one mistake after another, creating a popular impression that he is a weak president, at least when it comes to domestic affairs.

Twice in six months, miles of footage

entered around a downtown plaza. No American has savoured this scene in the neighbouring tiny Panama, as they didn't relish similar TV footage from the Tokyo party in November last year. However, the Panamanian incident — dismissed later by Bush as "tiny little Leftwing demonstration" — must have served as a catalyst to further encourage leaders at the Earth Summit to voice their displeasure at President Bush's policy against moves to save global environment. The current US environment policy appears ironical when one recalls that back on April 22, 1970, millions of Americans had participated in anti-pollution demonstrations.

Governments can change policies several times in the number of days between April 22, 1970 and June 13, 1992. However, President Bush fouled up again to rivet his vigorous opposition to the goals of the Earth Summit on the US economy. He asserts that accepting the Rio treaty would hurt US industries and thereby send the economy further down. The ultimate message the president is conveying to his countrymen then is that whatever his adversaries say about the US economy is correct. Obviously, the side messages about the administration's earnest efforts to correct the economic situation and occasional reports that the economy is resurging, are received by the voters with cynicism.

At least for local consumption, Bush made the Coalition War appear as a strategy that would help the US economy rebound. That did not happen. Political observers are educating the US masses that "the victory in the war (against Iraq) made no appreciable difference in the everyday life of the average American".

This is how, President Bush gradually exposed himself to all sorts of attacks for something that he could not be singled out while ignoring contributions by Ronald Reagan and Jimmy Carter.

And this is where an Asimovian Mule

achievements qualify him in the public eyes for such adventure at national plain. He electrified the American imagination from the powerhouse of the American ideology — capitalism that's really at work in national politics.

Perot blamed President Bush for causing the banking crisis with sloppy deregulation and said lobbying for foreign governments was a major reason for "all this foul up" in Washington. He is playing his cards more cleverly than the supposed main candidates. Knowing well the nature of his battles ahead with Congress, Perot send a powerful message across to Capitol Hill when he declared on Thursday that if the American people "elect me as their servant, that would send a message to Congress. I think that would close the gridlock".

The US system works on the principle of checks-and-balances. This system has always guarded freedom in the US and disallowed any sort of individual or collective dictatorship, at least in domestic affairs. Unlike the British democracy where the executive is part of the legislature and acts somewhat dictatorially on the strength of party position, in the US the most powerful man in the world may be cut down to size by the legislature or the judiciary; the judiciary may be corrected by the legislature; and the legislature may be vetoed by the executive. But when a partyless president would try to write a new businessman's constitution, he would certainly turn the checks-and-balances into checks-and-battles with Congress, with judiciary and with people. So Perot's message to Congress is more like an ultimatum from the "servant of the people of America".

The Perot candidacy is not important in a country where the national proverb goes that every child born in the United States can aspire to be president of the United States. What needs study — in and outside the US — is why a third candidate suddenly emerges more ap-

larged during his presidency and that is where the American people are seeking positive leadership rather than ploys, magnified military victories, death of the rival superpower, collapse of communism and end to the cold war.

This leadership is also not available with the Democratic Party. The US had the last one-term Democratic presidency three terms ago, and before that between 1961-68. Despite the love with which Americans remember John Kennedy, that president was as determined during the Bay of Pigs and Soviet-Cuba missile crises as George Bush was in Panama '89 and Iraq '90. If Bush is seen lacking in leadership qualities now, Kennedy lacked them too. However, the popular admiration that he still enjoys signifies an unfulfilled public desire for someone to be proud of as leader.

Whether Ross Perot can provide that leadership is an open ended question. But he can stir a chaos that, if true leadership is available, can be transformed into a new American Revolution. But that "if" is a six million dollar question.

If that "if" is not answered with a "yes", then it paints the dreaded scenario now being discussed openly after the unexpected collapse of America's rival superpower. Visionaries around the world had been thinking about that probability long before the Kremlin showed Gorbachevian-Shevarnadzean cracks and Perot eyed the White House.

It is too early to write off George Bush, but the case in point is whether a re-elected Bush would fill the vacuum that has been discovered much like the recent accident in the former East.

Nevertheless, now is the time for the Americans, especially their two major parties, to find leadership as well as faults with their leadership so as to rectify them. And it's time for non-Americans to visualise — not whimsically — a new world order.

how this kind of president can find himself in such serious trouble in this new era of populism and mass media campaigning. Still, the beating Bush has taken in recent days is quite unprecedented in recent memory and considerably self-inflicted.

He tried to hold a prime-time news conference right after his California primary "victory" and on the heels of Ross Perot's Ed Rollins-Hamilton Jordan coup. But not only didn't anyone come (only CNN carried it) but the president flopped around giving every impression he's become — and understandably so — nervous and jittery. Bad planning, bad timing, bad staff work, bad execution.

He tried to convince the nation that he was showing real leadership by finally proposing a constitutional amendment to balance the budget. But not only Congress did not oblige him, it seems a great many quickly saw how gimmicky the whole concept was, much more a political gambit than a serious and honest proposition. Bad planning, bad timing, bad staff work, bad execution.

He tried to make a foreign trip — usually a plus as the president gets to act presidential beyond American shores. But even after extraordinary efforts to arrange and protect a friendly crowd of pro-American Panamanians, Bush had to be taken away with the cameras showing a scene that looked as if someone has tried to assassinate him. And he then ended up on an American military base speaking as if he was addressing Panamanians but in reality it was pretty much an audience of Americans. So much for reminding Americans of Bush's foreign policy successes! Bad planning, bad timing, bad staff work, bad execution.

Faced with ongoing defections, the increasingly nervous Republicans have thus unleashed Vice President Dan Quayle who's now on the war path attacking the "elitists", the "media", the "experts" anyone else he can think of who doesn't subscribe to core Republican values; all in a rather transparent and desperate effort to shore up hard-core Republican-conservative support as fear grows that even Bush loyalists are being tempted to join Ed Rollins and switch to

crats, but to fight... drawn the job — which he obviously relishes — of rallying the truly loyal troops, keeping them entertained, and taking the initial swipes at the real enemy.

Meanwhile, in this new vortex of American politics, the so-called "Mid-east peace process" is not only unheard of, in reality it's dead and won't be revived, to this analyst's way of thinking, without major upheavals in the Mid-east region itself.

Of course the much-touted "peace process" always was rather illusory, a kind of diplomatic sop in the wake of the Coalition War which parts of the Arab and Palestinian establishments cautiously bought into for lack of any other alternatives.

Simply said, when it comes to the relatively minor matter of the Mid-East peace process — as far as most Americans are concerned — with either Clinton and Perot everything is quite bleak.

Clinton has already sold his sole on this issue — as symbolised by the rather amazing fact that he hired as the campaign's legal counsel the very same attorney who has the same role with the Israeli-Jewish lobby's point organisation, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC).

Perot shows every sign of not knowing what he's talking about when he mentions, quite rarely, the Israeli-Palestinian imbroglio; and at the moment, rumour has it, he's leaning to choosing no other than Jean Kirkpatrick as his running mate!

As for the Bush-Quayle duo, even should they stage a minor miracle comeback and retain power they will continue seeking the path of least resistance — ongoing negotiations aimed at some form of temporary autonomy arrangement from which the Palestinians can believe, if they must, that something more is coming and the Israelis can gradually get the Palestinian national issue off their back.

Who would have foreseen any of this just a year ago in the summer of 1991.

In my next column a closer look at the Perot phenomena and though it's become almost foolishly dangerous to predict anything these days, a look ahead.

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FORMULA TO SAVE SOMALI NATION FROM RUIN

THE Somali nation has become stuck in a quagmire from which it could not extricate itself, but the basic pathology is eluding most members of its society. It is the hoax called allegiance to a tribe that victimises all but the few who benefit from this catastrophe.

The vast majority of the Somali society has not yet learned the basic fact that, as citizens, rooting for a group of so-called politicians simply because they belong to the same tribe does not benefit anyone in the society except those who don the mantle of tribal leadership to masquerade as national leaders.

Three simple examples can portray a nation that has been victimised by its own folly to blow the magpies for monsters who led it up the garden path to near-total destruction.

Muhammad Siad Barre, and those who were benefiting from his govern-

ment, had built his system of administration on tribal basis. His modus operandi had been to hoodwink his own tribe, the Darod, into believing that his government was their own and that they had to protect it from other tribes through ruthless oppression. In implementation of this deception, he set off a cycle of death in which the Somali nation is still locked.

The vast majority of the Darod had not directly or indirectly benefited from Barre's regime. True some civil servants, people in the armed forces, and businessmen who had been given special trade facilitations, had managed to get wealthy through nepotism, but had the vast majority of the Darod benefited anything special from

Barre's regime?

The truth is that the vast majority of the Darod tribe had suffered from Barre's dictatorship as the other tribes in the country who had been singled out for stark persecution. Why? Because once the country was turned into a veritable hell on earth all citizens had suffered in one way or another; even the ones who served Barre selflessly at one time or another in his rule, got a strong dose of punishment at Barre's whims.

Falling into the same mistake that Barre made, some group within the Isaq tribe fell on each other in northern Somaliland in a bloody war that made no sense at all. Groups of "politicians" and ex-army officers fought over what Barre had left behind. They threw

clans of the Isaq tribe against each other using a deception aimed at convincing some clans that they had to be the ruling ones in the north, and in order to do that other clans had to be subdued.

Of course neither the "politicians" nor the group of officers who instigated the war died in the battles which claimed the lives of hundreds of deceived soldiers and civilians. It was a great tragedy, but again the victims were ordinary citizens who would have liked to live peacefully in their country.

In southern Somalia, the tragedy had been duplicated at a larger scale. After the fall of Barre's regime last January, southern Somalia went into a tailspin of bloodbath. The war is be-

ing waged in the name of tribes again, and hundreds of thousands of people of all tribes have been killed, and close to four million people are in danger of starving to death.

Again groups of self-seekers are creating carnage simply to gain power, that has no meaning in the midst of the devastation they have wrought, on a bandwagon of tribalism.

The lesson that could be learned from this perpetual crisis is that the ordinary citizens, no matter to what tribe or clan they belong, are always victimised by the ambitions of ruthless groups of men.

The Somali citizens have not yet woken up to the fact that their best insurance against recurrence of the tragedies that put them in a spider's web is

to make sure that no bad men ever comes to power. Unless every citizen gets his rights in his own country and acts in installing a good government led by honest men, they have no hope of ever amounting to anything and they will always be victims.

Gloating over the periodic disasters that befall one tribe or another, or certain clans within a tribe, is shortsightedness. One should feel pain at the loss of every single Somali, at each robbery and rape, at each suppression of an individual, at corruption and miscarriage of justice. Something is surely to happen to those who think they can dish out punishment and death to others. It is a vicious circle in which all suffer sooner or later.

The root cause of the disaster that befell the Somalis is lust for power that groups of bad people, who care for no one but themselves, have imposed on the Somali nation. The Somali nation suffers together, and it can end that suffering together. There is no other way. Every citizen is duty bound to turn around the current events.

As Spinoza had said long time ago: "If the state acts in ways abhorrent to human nature, it is lesser evil to destroy it".

The Somali people are not bad; they just don't have sense enough to realise that bad governments led by ruthless men is a monstrous machine that would devour them, no matter who the evil men running the machine are.