

CLINTON and GERGEN

FORMER REAGAN OPERATIVE DAVID GERGEN STARTS at the WHITE HOUSE

2 MANY STILL THINK them strange bed-fellows — but not really, not if one analyses more deeply the realities of life in Washington.

Bill Clinton and David Gergen are really far more two of a kind than appeared to be the case to most at first blush. In a place like Washington this match-up can take place between such a Democrat and such a Republican because in American politics such party distinctions are far more chimerical and transparent than is usually understood.

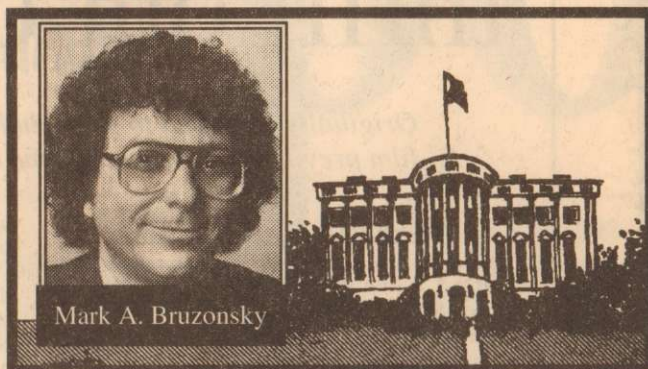
Both Clinton and Gergen are men who spent their entire lives chasing power and influence. Just as importantly they are both men who have always yielded their principle and conviction whenever the pursuit of personal goals was seriously challenged. Both men are, to say it simply, American-style politicians playing in a "democratic" system that has always been far closer to a single-party state than most Americans appreciate.

For the United States has evolved into the quintessential capitalistic, corporate, militarist state — and this means, that on many crucial issues, especially those relating to foreign policy, there is hardly any difference at all between "Democrats" and "Republicans" beyond style rhetorical nuances.

In most cases the same institutions, though often through the incarnation of different persons, fund both of the major parties, control nearly all of the major media outlets, and continually assert their dominance over whom ever happens to be at the helm in the White House.

A thoughtful way to better understand the contemporary American political system is to think of the US as being run by the "corporate-big money party". This is a party which in order to project itself as "democratic" — small 'd' in this case — is con-

From



Washington

The US is being run by the 'corporate-big money party'. This is a party which in order to project itself as 'democratic' — small 'd' in this case — is conveniently 'divided' into two major branches, that's the conservatives on the Right, the liberals on the Left.

One-party Democratic-Republican system

veniently "divided" into two major branches, that's the conservatives on the Right, the liberals on the Left.

Thought of in this way, it is much easier to understand both the camaraderie and the mobility that exists between party branches. The convenience of the system, of course, is that the electorate in reality only gets to occasionally choose between two options, and in nearly all cases neither option is all that different from the other.

Now of course there are some issues and some times when just which branch of the "corporate-big money party" is on top. But on the whole the American system remains re-

markably stable precisely because no major changes of course on the big issues are likely to be brought about by the electoral system. And the currently discussed changes in campaign finance reform will not alter these basic realities of how America is governed.

Thought of through this paradigm it is much earlier to appreciate how a Ronald Reagan began his political career as a Democrat, that is before he became a Republican; and how both parties courted Eisenhower to head each of their parties.

Thought of in this way it is also a lot easier to understand why the media last autumn were incessantly debating whether Ross Perot was

a Democrat or Republican — for in reality Perot is both, the major difference he and others being that since he funds himself he can pick and choose his alliances and doesn't need to rely on the largess of either branch of the "corporate-big money" party.

With this somewhat different paradigm of American politics than that usually presented, it becomes considerably easier to understand how a "Democratic" White House headed by a Bill Clinton can anoint as one of its most senior persons a "Republican" like Gergen. The underlying realities are that far more important than political affiliations are a variety of other facts, the most important of which is willingness to play the Washington game in the way that the financial and military interests which real control the US have defined the rules.

In the decades since World War II — the decades of the cold war and American dominance in world affairs in the wake of a defeated and exhausted Europe — Dwight Eisenhower's profound warnings about the dangers of the "military-industrial complex in the US have substantially escalated. Today, American politicians are entangled within this complex in so many ways that on crucial issues the man occupying the Oval Office is more actor than producer.

Thought about in this context, Bill Clinton is the current star and David Gergen the chief choreographer of the new American administration.

These roles were plain for all to see a few days ago as Clinton went on national television to tell of the latest bombings of Iraq.

The new president was clearly a bit over his head...nervous, insecure, reading from a script that made him uncomfortable. The spokesman for all this was indeed Clinton, but the man producing the event offstage was Gergen while the play itself was one that was written by the



has had in the public opinion polls, and from Congress' grudging willingness to accept his leadership, the Clinton-Gergen alliance can be considered a kind of symbolic "bipartisanship". And this term, "bipartisan" is just another way of expressing the single party nature of American politics.

My only personal contact with Gergen came a few years ago on the phone. Back then Gergen was busy manipulating journalistic affairs for his post-Reagan White House benefactor Morton Zuckerman, a real estate magnate who had purchased and made himself publisher of the news weekly *US News and World Report*.

Zuckerman bought *US News and World Report* in the mid-1980s and quickly went through a series of "personnel changes" which eventually resulted in his bringing Gergen on to give the publication enhanced visibility, credibility and an air of "bipartisanship".

I had written a column about Zuckerman's close ties to the Israelis and how he, like Martin Peretz at *The New Republic*, had on his agenda using his new magazine to boost Israel's fortunes in public opinion. But the heart of the column, the hook if you will, had to do with how a *US News* cover article that Zuckerman demonising Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini was actually part of a Mossad disinformation campaign.

Zuckerman, it had been brought to my attention, was funding Israeli journalists who themselves were feeding his publication Mossad-inspired information and then allowing (if not actually encouraging) the Mossad disinformation to be projected through the features of *US News and World Report*. In a sense, Zuckerman's new magazine had become a Mossad mouthpiece. Before publishing the column I dutifully called over to *US*

to dissuade me about the publication of the column.

But when that particular tact didn't work and questions about Zuckerman's relationship with Israel and Mossad kept coming Gergen turned a bit nasty and then insulting apparently thinking that as a last resort condescension and intimidation might work.

Whatever, I had the distinct impression at the time that Gergen cared little about the veracity of the story one way or another, but cared everything for doing what he could to protect and cover-up for his benefactor.

And in that sense the essence of the man, and the essence of what passes for "success" in contemporary Washington were revealed. This wasn't a journalist concerned about whether his magazine was being used by a foreign intelligence power and whether his employer was a dupe or a propagandist. This wasn't a man with integrity concerned about getting to the bottom of a potentially vital matter. This was a PR man, a fix-it man a political choreographer whose job at that time was to make Mort Zuckerman and *US News* look good. And now he's got the same job in the "Democratic" White House of Bill Clinton.

I never spoke with David Gergen again about this or anything else. But I did get a smile out of all this when a few weeks later I got a call from someone then working at *US News* to tell me that copies of the column had mysteriously been tacked up to a few bulletin boards — before being yanked down by Gergen that is.

In the end, it seems to me, Dave Gergen will do two things during his stint back in his familiar haunts at the White House. He will continually push Bill Clinton to the political centre — which is really where Clinton has been waiting to anyway on all but a couple of domestic issues — and he will continually attempt to "present" his new president to the

NEA





Fresh bid to start political process

UNION MINISTER OF STATE FOR Kashmir Affairs Rajesh Pilot's recent visit to the trouble-torn Valley of Kashmir to "win back" the alienated people of Kashmir has again proved a fiasco. Pilot as usual visited a few places in the valley and met a number of deputations of people emphasising the need for maintaining peace and amity in the state.

Among the deputationists Pilot had to face tough time with was while talking to parents of the missing youth of the valley who have not been told the whereabouts of their children for the last two years.

This unfortunate lot of human material is contained with the usual assurances that they will be traced soon. Pilot during his stay visited Gurez, a border town just adjacent to line of actual control.

He addressed the local population and apprised them of the efforts being made by the government to bring back normalcy to the state. However, his rhetoric did not convince the people because there are vivid examples of excesses by the security forces on innocent population, especially in the rural areas of the valley where the forces indulge in free for all.

When the people apprised him about the sexual assaults on womenfolk at Zainakote, Kupwara and Kremshore in the recent past, Pilot felt sorry and assured a "thorough investigation". But the unfortunate part of the story is that the results of such enquiries have never been made public by the governor's administration so far and such investigations have always remained shrouded in mystery.

The main event during Pilot's visit here was the Eid Milan party hosted by Governor, General K V Krishnarao, at the Raj Bhavan at Srinagar. As witnessed by this reporter from the TV screen there was poor response to governor's invitation. Those who responded to governor's invitation were some of the senior bureaucrats, the state police chief, the state chief secretary and the heads of different paramilitary forces functioning at present in Kashmir and members of the press who had accompanied Pilot

M D GILKAR

Saudi gazette Correspondent in Srinagar

from Delhi. The function lacked public enthusiasm and fervour.

At its own place it appears that the government of P V Narasimha Rao is dead set to hold the elections in the state within the period of one year and till then the president's rule in the state is likely to continue which necessitates introduction of an amendment to the constitution of India. This aspect of the situation has been discussed at a higher level by the centre with Krishnarao who was summoned to New Delhi recently.

The green signal to this effect is reported to have been percolated down to different political parties with pro-India stance and the paramilitary forces at present handling the situation in the valley. Soon after his return from Delhi the governor held a meeting of the State Security Board which was attended by the advisors to governor, senior officers from the civil administration and different paramilitary forces organisations at present functioning in the state. The general officer commanding the Northern Command also participated in the meeting.

In his address while underlining the need to bring back the "misguided youth" to the national mainstream the governor said that those surrendering would be given a fair deal and rehabilitated through special rehabilitation centres for them.

The meeting also discussed at length the confidence building measures, creating of conditions for restoring normalcy and reviving the democratic process in the state as these measures would go a long way in eliminating the alienation among the people of the valley.

It is essential to remove the fear of the gun so that the people can resume their normal activities without any threat perception. The governor added that "the steps taken to increase pressure on the militants and conduct operations without

harassing the local population have resulted in very encouraging response from the public because they were tired of the militancy".

Activist organisation have, in the meantime, again rejected the offer for negotiations made by Pilot. The pro-Pakistan organisation, Hizbullah, has said that "negotiations were not possible till the government accepted Kashmir as a "disputed issue" and shows willingness to solve it in accordance with the UN resolutions.

According to chief spokesman of the organisation, Kaleem Siddiqui, "the ongoing movement had not been launched to get compensation but its sole objective is to get the dispute solved as per the wishes of the people".

Another outfit, Al-Umar, has said that "the voice of the people could not be crushed by suppression and the government would have to bow to the aspirations of the Kashmiri people as happened in Afghanistan. The people have been sacrificing everything to take the ongoing movement to its logical end and no stone would be left unturned to achieve their goal".

The Ikhwan-ul-Muslimeen, another movement, has opined that the oppressive measures begin used by the Indian establishment would by no means discourage the people of the state from taking the ongoing struggle to its logical conclusion. Similar views have been expressed by other organisation at present engaged into the ongoing struggle for achieving the right of self-determination.

While at the state level, Governor Krishnarao, has hinted at holding elections within a period of one year, New Delhi is still dithering on the question. To the amusement of all, central Home Minister S B Chavan is reported to have remarked publicly that "he is not aware of the game plan of Pilot who is dealing with Kashmir". This provides an insight into the confusion that prevails in New Delhi over the Kashmir policy. It is evident that there is no coherence in the approach of men at helm in New Delhi in regard to Kashmir and they function at cross-purposes.

Likewise, for inexplicable reasons, Prime Minister Rao is also avoiding to hold a national consensus by discussing the issue with the opposition parties. Administrative action has its own limitations. The fact remains that the vexed issue of Kashmir is overwhelmingly political. New Delhi must adopt a clear perception and then devise a multi-pronged strategy to win back the confidence of the people, eliminating their alienation, assuaging the hurt feelings of the masses by avoiding excesses, releasing hundreds of innocent persons in jails, streamlining the moribund administration to make it in tune with the peoples' aspirations and, last but not the least, initiating a purposeful dialogue to find a reasonable solution to the basic political problem.

Ultimately the crisis has to be resolved and an amicable solution found through a process of dialogue with the cross-section of the population. In resolving the crisis one cannot brush aside the role of the new emerging leadership in the valley who have taken to arms as a result of the indifference of the traditional leaders towards their genuine urges and aspirations. This dialogue should be without fetters and preconditions.

At the present moment the optimism evinced by Governor Krishnarao for holding elections appears misplaced. There is no discernible in the ground situation to pave the way for such political adventure. The militants continue to possess the striking power. According figures presented to the director general of the Border Security Force during his recent visit to the valley, as a result of the intensified actions of the militants as many as 216 security forces personnel have died in the recent past who included one colonel, Jai Singh, and injuring a major-general of the army, Inder Verma, in the Rafiabab area of the valley. BSF chief, Prakash Singh, had come here on a three-day visit to the valley to assess the situation.

At present, as rightly concluded by the veteran Indian journalist, Kuldeep Nayyar, after his recent tour of the valley as member of a human rights team: "Kashmir is being held, and not administered".

SRI LANKA'S PARLIAMENTARY

select committee on the ethnic question has decided that a referendum should be held in the Eastern Province within the next four months, to determine whether the people of the province wish the temporary north-east merger to continue or to be delinked.

The temporary merger of the Eastern and the Northern Provinces was effected under the terms of the India-Sri Lanka accord of 1987, when it was agreed that a referendum in the east, to be held within a year, would give the people of that province the opportunity to decide whether the majority of its people wished the link to continue or not.

It is reported that there had been contacts between the parliamentary select committee and the defence secretary, the army commander, inspector general of police and the elections commissioner on the possibility of the referendum, postponed several times since 1988, being accomplished in the short term.

When there was a consensus of opinion among the non-Tamil political parties that the temporary merger should be done away with and two separate provincial councils should be set up in the Northern and the Eastern Provinces, several of the Tamil political parties ceased to attend the proceedings of the parliamentary select committee. Attempts are now being made to induce the Tamil political parties no longer in the select committee's proceedings to reenter the process, in view of the decision to hold a referendum in the Eastern Province.

Movement towards restoring a proper civil administration in the Eastern Province is expected to catalyse aid for the reconstruction and rehabilitation of the province. It is felt that the rehabilitation of the Eastern Province can be expected to make the people of the Jaffna Peninsula better appreciate the advantages of an end to the conflict.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) can be expected, however, to do its utmost to destabilise the Eastern Province in an effort to prevent any referendum being held in that province. If the parliamentary select committee's recommendations on the referendum are to be implemented, the

News asking to speak to Zuckerman and get his side of the story.

Instead, after explaining things to an intermediary, I was eventually put to Gergen as the publication's editor-in-chief.

The conversation was pretty banal, at first Gergen trying to sweet talk me into doubting what I had learned, acting as if he knew nothing about any such charges against Zuckerman (which he may well not have), and thus trying

press, and to the public, in ways designed to maximise his image...whatever the cost in substance, integrity, principle, and conviction.

Such are the ways of Washington in this age of saturation communications, instant global reporting, ever-present media manipulation. We live in the age of the political "handlers".

"Democratic" American is really governed by a single party which those wanting to be "successful" are always willing to serve.

REFERENDUM IS RECONSIDERED

H DEEN

Special to the Saudi Gazette from Colombo

security forces many have to counter increased Tiger activity in the Eastern Province.

Although the Sri Lankan government claims that the Eastern Province is under government control, there are many pockets of resistance where LTTE cadres are in control. Recently, four villages situated in the north of Valaichchenai were wrested from Tiger control, by the security forces. One dozen Tigers were killed during these clearing operations. Several security personnel were injured.

Meanwhile, a five-member international peace mission headed by the Thai Buddhist monk Somachai flew to Jaffna to have talks with the LTTE hierarchy. The other members of the peace mission are bishop Juan de Dios Pueblos of the Philippines, bishop Anthony Selvanayagam of Malaysia, Father Irene Gofdoncillo of the Philippines and Caroline Spires of Britain.

Environment and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Dr Wimal Wickremasinghe stated that the international peace mission which travelled to Jaffna for a discussion with the LTTE carried no message from the government nor were given any undertaking to speak on its behalf. However, the mission was provided with facilities for their travel to the peninsula by the Sri Lankan government on the basis that it was an international mission.

Negotiations are also afoot with the LTTE through the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) for the release of the 39 policemen in its custody, in exchange for the release of 60 LTTE cadres in government custody.

In the meantime, the government security forces are consolidating their positions and establishing several detachments in the Batticaloa north area from which the LTTE terrorists are reported to have been driven out. However, past experience shows that the LTTE cadres normally withdraw in the face of opposition by government forces and then regroup.

Member of parliament Joseph Pararajasingham of the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) representing the Batticaloa district is of the view that the ground situation in the Eastern Province is not conducive to holding a referendum due to the large numbers of refugees who have not been resettled.

Some Sinhalese politicians argue that if the government could have a general election and a presidential election in the throes of the JVP (Janata Vimukthi Peramuna) violence, then there is no reason why a referendum cannot be held for the demerger of the north and the east.

The LTTE, in an editorial published in its weekly *Hot Springs* has opposed the parliamentary select committee's attempts at a demerger. According to it, the Tamil parties are opposed to a demerger because they feel "it goes against the concept of a traditional homeland", a view that is strongly held by the LTTE.

Arguments and counter-arguments on the referendum issue have resurfaced in an atmosphere in which the parliamentary select committee seems to be determined to make the government hold the referendum to decide whether the temporary merger of the two provinces should be made permanent or whether the two provinces should be delinked.

It is hoped that the holding of a referendum in the Eastern Province will not be the cause of another cycle of bloody violence.