

The Pentagon Document

A broad position paper of the US Defence Department on the country's role in the post-Cold War era, now said to be in its final drafting stage, may not necessarily turn out to be the final policy statement of the Bush Administration on the subject. However, it is certain to have a major impact, perhaps even a decisive one, on the policy direction of Washington on a whole range of issues, from the size of the US armed forces to the country's attitude towards Japan and Germany on the question of their possible massive rearmament.

Judging by whatever has been revealed by The New York Times, the document provides a new insight into the current US thinking. But it is also not without many disturbing implications.

The basic premise which determines the overall approach and, indeed, specific recommendations, is that in entering a new era, marking the end of superpower rivalry, the United States must be prepared to undertake new challenges, virtually on its own, militarily rather than politically, to ensure that no new superpower or even major regional powers emerge on the scene. This means that instead of working towards collective internationalism that marked the western strategy at the end of the Second World War, Washington may be ready to lay down the rules, even unilaterally, in dealing with any crisis, bilateral or multilateral, anywhere in the world. In the pursuit of such an objective, the choice of method remains with Washington, like boarding North Korean ships allegedly delivering Scud missiles to Syria and Iran, a move that The New York Times says would be "an act of war." Again, while Washington must rightly do everything in its power to prevent proliferation of nuclear weapons, it is far from clear how it would act against any country which develops nuclear capability for non-peaceful purposes. The thought that Washington would launch a preemptive attack on such a country and risk a nuclear war is frightening. In the opinion of Pentagon, Washington must also remain sensitive to the "potentially destabilising effects" in East Asia if Japan and Korea assume enhanced roles as regional powers, maintain a strong presence in NATO and should not rule out "military steps" to prevent the development of mass weapons in countries like Iraq, North Korea, Pakistan and India. In order to play such a role, the role of a world policeman, the United States should support a 1.6 million-man force over the next five years, at a cost of about 1.2 trillion dollars. There is little doubt that this massive proposed defence expenditure will set the pace for other countries in Europe, Middle East and Asia to maintain the present level of their defence budgets, even if they can be persuaded not to raise it. So, herein goes the illusion that nations, rich and poor, would now cut their military expenses and divert their saving to development purposes.

The document apparently makes no mention of a possible enhanced role for the United Nations in the changed situation. Similarly, it says little or nothing about close consultation between the US and its allies to pave the way for joint political measures in time of crisis. Finally, it sees no need for the renewal of North-South dialogue in which Washington could indeed play a pivotal role.

In its present form, the Pentagon document offers little hope of a new world order that will be qualitatively different from the one we have known for all these decades. At this stage, one hope is that the enlightened public opinion in the United States, especially the Congress, would like to see their country play a role that is based more on global co-operation than on sheer armed strength, more as a custodian of peace than as a policeman of the world. The international community would be behind this enlightened public opinion in the United States, when it takes its position against the Pentagon document.

Bhutan-Bangladesh Joint Venture

Bhutan is keen to establish joint ventures with Bangladesh. This was disclosed by visiting Bhutanese minister for Trade and Industry Lyonpo Om Pradhan in Dhaka on Tuesday last. There is no reason why Bangladesh should not reciprocate in matching terms to the Bhutanese offer. After all, these two countries have between them several things common. First, as neighbours, they find themselves at the bottom of the list of nations prepared by the United Nations based on economic and other vital national statistics. Second, both the nations are members of the South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation (SAARC). Finally, the two nations with their deficiencies in certain resources and surplus in others stand to benefit mutually.

Given such a strong premise, the interest shown by the Bhutanese side in exploring areas of co-operation in joint ventures in the two countries should be read as a further positive development in the already warm relations between them. On its part, Bangladesh has the advantageous position in offering some of its expertise in industrialisation effort of Bhutan. Cement industry is one such area where the two nations have expressed their willingness to co-operate. Rich in timber, Bhutan offers a nice opportunity for Bangladesh to import the item to meet the latter's growing demand. Then, perhaps, manpower from Bangladesh can richly contribute to Bhutan's agriculture, particularly fruit cultivation.

In fact, areas of joint venture are not limited if the governments of the two countries decide in favour of expanding the horizon. Hopefully, the current visit of the Trade and Industry Minister of Bhutan will provide a new impetus to the collaborative effort towards that end. The important point is to begin the process and provide it with all the necessary supports.

One sore point that still remains, however, is the lack of improvement in the regional political climate compared to the global one. Within the framework of a more liberal but stronger SAARC, such bilateral as well as multilateral co-operation — be it in joint ventures, trades or elsewhere — could indeed get a new momentum. That has not happened as yet at the desired level. But then such bilateral agreements can be both the cause and effect of greater regional co-operation. In that sense, the current wavelength of the two countries have found a meeting place — hopefully for further expansion.

THE British parliamentary elections, scheduled to be held this year, are practically round the corner. They are expected to be taking off either in April or at the latest in May. The two main parties involved in a tussle for the votes of the electorate, the ruling Conservative or Tory Party and the opposition Labour Party, have begun campaigning in earnest and the smaller opposition party, the Liberal Democrats, is also following suit. In fact, the Liberal Democrats are offering the only radical alternative to both the Tories and Labour. They propose electoral and constitutional reforms necessary, as says the party leader Paddy Ashdown, to bring about real democracy and promote economic growth.

Now, the votes of the considerably large Asian community in Britain could be very crucial in what is expected to be an extremely close general election. The opposition Labour Party claims to have won the support of most Asians so far. However, the Conservatives have also been presenting themselves as the true champions of family values and free enterprise considered so important by the Asian community. At present, there are close to two million Asians in Britain and they are held in very high esteem in many ways by British politicians. Of course, the Asians have been playing their role in the politics of this country for ages. The first Asian was elected to the House of Commons one hundred years ago when the community numbered a few thousand at the most. In 1987, there were four Asians elected to the House of Commons and

The Changing Role of Asian Voters in British Elections

Sagar Chaudhury writes from London

According to the best estimate of political analysts in Britain, the chances are that the number of Asian MPs will double at the forthcoming elections. There may be as many as three on the Labour benches and the Conservative have their first Asian MP since 1906. The Asians are still quite under-represented in the British political arena, is certainly scope for improving the situation considerably.

When Labour candidate Mr Ashok Kumar was by-election last November, the number of Asian (or "ethnic" in British political terminology) MPs totalled five.

According to the best estimate of political analysts in Britain, the chances are that the number of Asian MPs will probably double at the forthcoming elections. There may be as many as three on the Labour benches and the Conservatives too may have their first Asian MP since 1906. The Asians are still quite under-represented in the British political arena, but there is certainly scope for improving the situation considerably.

Mr Narendra Makanji, a Labour left-winger and a leader of the party's Coloured sections, believes that with greater determination this under-representation can certainly be remedied. According to him, most political parties in Britain seem to harbour the misapprehension that putting Coloured candidates up for elections are like backing wrong horses, although the Coloured and/or Asian people

are determined to take their proper place in the politics of this country. They feel — and no doubt with some truth — that there can be no real freedom without adequate political representation.

Tough Obstacles

Asians keen on getting such representation, however, must cross some tough obstacles. Quite a few of the Asian politicians — belonging to one camp or the other — feel, not without reason perhaps, that there is a degree of subtle racism prevailing in the political system in this country, which succeeds, to some extent, to make Asians chary of entering politics. Most of them have not the stomach for it and prefer to keep themselves from being directly involved. This accounts for the relative absence of Asians from political life which in turn makes it more difficult for the parties to attract the Asian vote, although records show that the majority of them voted Labour at the last election. The Conservatives also have been assiduously trying to make headway among the ethnic

communities and to persuade Asian millionaires — of whom there are quite a few in Britain — to contribute to the party coffers. The Tory hierarchy have apparently come to realise — albeit belatedly — the value of the role played by the Asian community in the economy of this country and they are now trying to woo the Asian business people and to give them a feel that their contributions are being recognised.

However, it is probably wiser not to assume that the wealthy Asian entrepreneurs represent the wider community. In fact, whether business people are Asian or non-Asian, White or non-White, everywhere they always support the party which, according to their calculations, is a sure winner. If the statistics of the last parliamentary elections are to be taken into account, the Asian community in Britain voted by the large for Labour, and it is no doubt enigmatic that a community which puts so much emphasis on private enterprise, thrift and the family should generally support a left-of-the centre party. Some

Labour leaders are fond of describing this as a legacy of the 40's, when a Labour government gave independence to India and Pakistan. On the other hand, the Conservatives claim that the Asians are now reassessing their political loyalties, because they are finding that the ideology of the Conservatives is very similar to their own philosophy of life. On the surface at least, this claim may have some kernel of truth in it. An average Asian values personal freedom, wants to own property or a business and does not care for any one having to tell him what to do. Conservative leaders declare that their party is very conducive to these ideas or sentiments, and that is why more and more Asians are now leaning towards the Conservative Party.

Opinion Polls

Labour leaders, however, dispute this claim. They point out that an opinion poll taken among the Asian community a few months ago suggested that Labour supporters outnumbered Conservative supporters by four to one.

Vietnam — Mixing Capitalism with Communism

Stephen Carr writes from Jakarta

Now that Vietnam can no longer purchase goods from the former Soviet Union, it must look elsewhere to take advantage of international markets. Its options are limited by a continuing embargo by the United States, but other nations, such as Indonesia, are prepared to deal with the impoverished communist country. Gemini News Service reports on how Vietnam is learning to mix its socialist ideology with capitalist practicality.

Vietnam is caught in a strange trading position. It has lost its client status with the former Soviet Union and Eastern Bloc, but the United States is still enforcing its trade embargo with the communist Vietnamese government.

Americans are forbidden by their Trading With The Enemy Act to deal with the Vietnamese, and the Southeast Asian country must look elsewhere for its international markets and suppliers.

While the government embraces communist ideology, it has seen that blind socialism should not stand in the way of reforms to a struggling economy. The country needs capital, and for that it needs capital, and for that it needs foreign trade and investment.

Vietnam's long border, extensive coastline and navigable rivers make it a natural trading nation. It has fertile soil and large mineral deposits, including oil, natural gas, iron ore, bauxite, copper, chromium, gold, and three billion tonnes of coal.

Inland waterways and irrigation systems provide major potential for sea and river products, and hydro-electric capacity is possible far beyond existing levels. The country's seven million hectares of forest, under threat of depletion from agricultural pressures, could be an important resource if well managed.

The Vietnamese also offer a better educated and more highly skilled labour force than is typical for such a low income society.

Now Vietnam is looking towards its neighbours in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) as its new economic models, hoping one day to join the group.

It would like to emulate the economic success of Indonesia, a country that has progressed a quarter-century from the isolation and stagnation that Vietnam endures.

Indonesia's anti-capitalist ideology of the Sixties has been replaced with a liberal market economy, foreign investment, slashing of foreign debt and reduction of inflation into double figures.

In the mid-Eighties, trade



Economy: 1990	
Growth rate	2.4%
Total estimate of external debt	14.6b
Total exports	\$1,570m
Total imports	\$1,940m
Main trading partners (% by value)	
Japan	42.1
Hong Kong	11.8
Philippines	8.0
Thailand	6.7
Germany	3.0
France	2.3
EC	7.8
Exports	23.2
Imports	14.8

was negligible between Indonesia and Vietnam. Each year, Indonesia sold less than \$5 million worth goods to Vietnam, and bought a little more than \$6 million worth back.

But by 1990, Indonesia was exporting fertiliser, cement, pharmaceuticals, motorbikes, tyres and foodstuffs worth \$27 million. Vietnam sent back \$39 million worth of mostly agricultural products, including soy beans, groundnuts, maize, green beans and garlic.

Both governments say this trade is just the beginning of what is possible. Indonesian President Suharto visited Vietnam in 1990, and a seminar to discuss

trading opportunities between the two countries was organised for the following year in Ho Chi Minh City. Their trade ministers signed agreements on economic, scientific and technical co-operation.

Later in 1991, Vietnamese Prime Minister Vo Van Kiet visited Jakarta and signed agreements with Indonesia on air transport, merchant shipping and the protection of foreign investments in Vietnam.

Protection of assets is one of the main concerns of foreign investors in Vietnam. To allay fears, the government stated that enterprises with invested foreign capital are independent units, free from state interference to make their own decisions on production and marketing, profit and loss.

Overtures to ASEAN, of which the Indonesian effort is a component, form part of a much broader front in Vietnamese foreign policy.

A Vietnamese delegation was at Switzerland's prestigious World Economic Forum earlier this year to woo more corporate and national investment.

Since drafting a new law on foreign investment in 1987, Vietnam has attracted investors from more than 30 countries who have promised to invest more than \$2 billion in the country.

The competition is made easier for foreign investors with the absence of American bidders, although it is possible the US embargo could be lifted.

The US has set conditions on the embargo's removal that peace and democracy must be restored to Cambodia. United Nations peacekeeping troops are now in Cambodia, after the country's warring factions signed a peace treaty last year.

"Progress" must also be made on investigating the fate of more than 2,000 American

servicemen unaccounted for after the war. A US team was sent to Hanoi last year to work on the sensitive issue, but results are yet to be seen.

Meanwhile, Indonesian conglomerates have already been licensed to pursue five joint ventures with Vietnam, to set up a bank, a coal company, a garment factory, an air service and an agricultural/industrial concern.

Many other areas have been identified by the Vietnamese government as suitable for Indonesian participation. During a recent pitch to the Indonesian business community to invest in his country, Vietnam's commercial attaché in Jakarta admitted that hotels at home are in a woeful state.

"In many important centres they are bad enough to discourage even the hardest visi-

ters," Ngo Khac Nghia said.

Indonesia has been developing its tourist trade for the past 20 years, and Vietnam feels some of its experienced hotel operators are well placed to help upgrade hotels that have suffered decades of neglect. The Indonesian Astra and Summa group is preparing hotel renovation projects, as well as ventures in coal mining and cement production.

Vietnam also wants Indonesian help to train tourist industry personnel, air crew and flight technicians, and for the two countries to open more air routes between them. Upgrading airports and seaports and improving air traffic control equipment are other likely areas of future co-operation.

In oil and gas exploration, Vietnam needs management

According to them, most Asians in Britain belong to the working class who hold "lousy" jobs, are poorly paid and have to suffer poor working conditions. That part of the Asian community which may be said to fit the description of middle-class and middle-income group is only the tip of the iceberg, and even the so-called middle class have been seriously affected by Tory policies like the Poll Tax which has had a telling effect on the larger family structure so dear to the Asian way of life. The present economic recession too — which has seen the highest ever interest rates — has adversely affected the community.

At the same time, left-wing politicians are worried that however do the Asians vote, their contributions to the society at large may remain unacknowledged and unappreciated. A prominent Liberal Democrat official, Ms Zerbano Gifford, recently told BBC in an interview: "I'd like to stress that 40% of the National Health Services is run by minorities. Twenty-five per cent of the GPs are Asian. The community is looking to people who are in the political mainstream to actually stress the positive aspects of our community, and ask: 'Why is it that there are 44,000 people on public bodies and so few of them are Asians?' That's a sad fact indeed. The Asians have so much to contribute, yet they are never encouraged to contribute or sit on these bodies."

That is a moot question which will have to be answered by whoever forms the next Government in Britain.

The writer is a Producer, BBC World Service, London.

OPINION

Telephone: Some Anomalies

Many letters have been written about the telephone department and its careless attitude towards subscribers, be it service, rates or billing. A lot has been said about the service and billing without yielding any remarkable improvement. Complaints of fictitious bills and telephones remaining out of order for days on end, are commonly heard. But so far hardly anything has been said about the unreasonable rates being charged by this department.

Recently, I visited Germany and England and very carefully I went through a few telephone bills of these countries and the rate schedules. I found that the telephone department in Bangladesh is very unreasonably compelling subscribers to pay for the time that has not been used. For example, bills for ISD telephones in both England and Germany (and I presume in most other countries of the world), are charged on the basis of "pulses" rather than minimum time. A call made to Bangladesh from London for 6 min. 10 sec. is charged for "179 pulses" i.e. 6.14 mins whereas the same call in Bangladesh would be charged for 7 minutes. In Bangladesh, charging the call @ Tk 100/- per minute would amount to Tk 700 for the said call. In England, charging @ £7/- per minute, the same call would cost £ 6.10 only. If British Telecom would charge on the same basis as that of Bangladesh, the same call would cost @ 7/-.

Sometimes when a subscriber dials a number and for some reason the call is not established, the call is recorded for say 10 secs. This frustrated call would be charged here for a full minute, while in a similar case British Telecom would charge only for 10 secs, i.e. 10 p (@£1/- per minute).

The frequency of failed connections from Bangladesh being quite considerable (from England, it is very rare) one can imagine how much

right to know. Will the T & T department come forward with the real facts?

Finally, telephone is a very essential medium of communication — as important today as letters were in the old days. Who has not read the story of the young girl to whom the postman delivered a letter, but which she returned as it was too costly for her to accept (in those days, the recipient had to pay). When she was asked why she returned the letter, she replied that she and her brother had an understanding: if his letter was white, it meant he was well. The British Postal Department started the Penny-post for the benefit of the ordinary people. Today the telephone has replaced the letter to a great extent. It gives one a chance to take to near and dear ones far away; many an old mother in a mofussil town craves to talk to her son who lives abroad, but she cannot afford to do so because of the high rates. She probably thinks many times before calling anyone living in a distant part of the country, because even domestic rates are high. T & T being a service department, should realise the agony that such people go through — introduce half rates for overseas calls made at off-peak hours when telephone lines remain under-utilized. The domestic half-rate should start at 9.00 pm instead of 10.00 pm. This would give more people the chance to make more domestic calls. Similarly, overseas calls should also be half-rated at certain times of the day or night.

I take this opportunity of drawing the attention of our honourable Minister in Charge, the Chairman, T & T Board, and the honourable Members of Parliament to take up this matter and wake up the T & T department and bring some redress to the poor subscribers and the taxpayers.

M. Chowdhury
Dhaka

To the Editor...

Village needs development

Sir, Chhatni is a remote village in Adamdighi upazila under Bogra district. It is perhaps the biggest village in the upazila in respect of population. Because of its remoteness both from the upazila and the district headquarters, it cannot easily court with the officials or development planners. As a result the village is not receiving its due share of grants for rural development. However, the village saw some development over the past years; and the credibility for such a development goes to its active and enthusiastic people first and then to the government.

The village has a high school, a sub-post office, a Railway flag station. The small bazaar that sits everyday is the centre of economic activity. The locally produced mat (Pati) is the principal commodity for trade which is also the Railway's principal source of revenue here. We urge the government to arrange for loan

for growers and weavers of mat, "as is given to textile weavers. There is a possibility of tremendous growth in this sector if governmental care is given which can also solve unemployment problem to a good extent.

Santahar, a three-mile walk from the village, is the closest town to the north. People go to the town for schooling, shopping, and for medical treatment. But the connecting katcha road remains muddy for about 7/8 months round the year when people suffer most. We always cherished to have a bitumen road to make the passage easy specially for those patients requiring immediate medication. There is a veterinary dispensary which remains closed for reasons unknown. The village also feels the need of a dispensary-cum-mini-hospital and rural electrification for its 15000 population.

We have tried in vain to implement these works in the past. We hope the present democratic government will take up the matter seriously and expedite its efforts for the

uplift of those people who are striving hard to develop themselves.

Ulfat Hussain
Chhatni, Adamdighi, Bogra.

Too cold winter

Sir, It's utter surprising and unbelievable! Someone on earth has to come up with an explanation over the apparent absence of Bangladesh at the last World Winter Olympics in France. The reason being lack of Olympic standard may not simply be convincing enough.

As Bangladesh is well known for her sports enthusiasm and participations in the international competitions, prospects for her winter sports may not be as negative as appear to be.

By any probability, the possibility of upgrading her sports standard will highly depend on the right training for the "right stuff" among 110 million Bangladeshis boasting many international laureates.

M Rahman
Zila School Road, Mymensingh.