

Japan

Lifting ineffective sanctions on India and Pakistan

MONZURUL HUQ writes from Tokyo

JAPAN these days is increasingly appearing to be a country willing to take a departure from its post-war non-combative foreign policy that even disallowed the country to take any active part in peacekeeping operations under the United Nations. The recent terrorist attack against key US installations and subsequent political maneuvering by the United States compelled Japan to come out of its military isolation and take initiatives that would no longer keep the country at bay in conflicts posing serious threats to the stability of the whole world. Since then, Japan's House of Representatives on October 18 passed a new anti-terrorism bill that would allow country's Self Defense Force or SDF, to play a supporting role to the US forces in its attacks on suspected terrorist bases in Afghanistan.

Upper House approval of the bill is expected soon and Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi is considering a US request to send escort ships to the Indian Ocean. This possible deployment of SDF naval fleet out of country's sea boundary is to mark the start of a new phase of Japanese diplomacy as it would be Japan's largest and possibly most controversial offshore military deployment since country's defeat at the end of

World War II in 1945.

Till now Japan is considered to be the most important player in international diplomacy of providing funding for important military or non-military operations. But the experience of Tokyo's Gulf War participation has convinced country's policymakers of the ineffectiveness of any such initiative. In a crisis where Japan had much at stake in preserving vital oil supply from the Middle East, constitutional restraints and few other factors compelled the country only to play cheque-book diplomacy by providing 13 billion dollars as its share of the total cost of the war. For this, Japan won little international praise.

Since then, Japan has been actively involved in increasing its military reach through participations in a number of UN peacekeeping operations in Cambodia and elsewhere, and also through parliamentary debates over the issue of country's future military role in case of emergency. The anti-terrorist bill is a result of that relatively lengthy process, despite the fact that it was hurriedly compiled after the September 11 incidents. But any direct Japanese involvement in military actions of her allies would not mean an end to country's long-standing foreign policy of economic assistance. Japan has already become too important a

player to drift away from that arena of international relations and policy makers in Tokyo are also not considering it as a viable option.

On the contrary, an expanded involvement of Japan in the process of rebuilding nations suffering from the destruction of war is also being sought by its western allies, all of which are facing serious economic crisis due to a slowdown of the world economy. As a result, a duel role is what some analysts are expecting that Tokyo is going to play from now on. Tokyo's recent announcement of the suspension of its economic sanctions on India and Pakistan is probably the most important indication of that future course of Japanese diplomacy.

Japan said on Friday before the last it would suspend sanctions on India and Pakistan, clearing the way for fresh economic aid in a show of support for the two nations during US-led strikes on Afghanistan. Announcing the decision of the government, Chief Cabinet Secretary Yasuo Fukuda said Tokyo would discuss specific economic steps later to help ensure political and economic stability in the two South Asian countries.

The sanctions were imposed in May 1998 soon after the two countries carried out nuclear tests. Japan froze all new yen loans and grant aid

except emergency and humanitarian assistance. Economic sanctions had since then remained in place, as India and Pakistan subsequently did not sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. Fukuda stressed that India and Pakistan had stuck to the self-imposed unilateral moratoriums on nuclear testing shortly after the first test blast and hinted that Japan may consider reinstating the sanctions in the future if the nuclear non-proliferation situation is threatened.

Despite Tokyo's official pronouncement of the lifting of sanctions on India and Pakistan, many consider it to be a symbolic gesture as the sanctions remained largely ineffective in both the countries. Japan is still Pakistan's largest aid donors, although new yen loans and grants were stopped in 1998. At the time of the September terrorist attack, a group of six Japanese were helping build a tunnel in a mountainous area near Peshawar. Repair work of the Indus Highway that runs from Peshawar to Karachi is covered mainly by Japanese loans of nearly 50 billion yen. As Japanese companies form essential component of sub-contracting firms involved in such activities, Japan hardly can afford to carry out the policy of sanctions in an effective manner. Many loopholes within the official decision allowed Japanese companies

to carry out business as usual both in India and Pakistan.

The attack on Afghanistan opened up a new window of opportunity for Pakistan, which country's military regime did not hesitate to utilize. Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf asked Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi in a telephone conversation in mid-October for a review of sanctions and also for debt cancellation worth 5 billion dollars to cover an estimated 2 billion dollars economic losses the country expected in the wake of the terrorist attack. Japan also quickly decided for a 4.7 billion yen emergency aid package for Pakistan.

India, on the other hand, still remains in the list of top 10 recipient countries of Japan's Official Development Assistance despite the economic sanctions. In 1999 the country received more than 76 billion yen of Japanese assistance, whereas the share for Pakistan for the same year was more than 20 billion yen. All these facts and figures clearly show how ineffective Japan's loudly proclaimed decision of economic sanctions against India and Pakistan was.

Japan is particularly worried about the volatile political situation in Pakistan and the Koizumi administration is concerned that if Pervez Musharraf's government is toppled and

the Islamic fundamentalists get their hands on country's nuclear weapons, this might cause irreparable damage not only to the regional stability, but to the world peace in general. Taking into consideration recent developments within Pakistan, a group of Japanese analysts think that such a scenario cannot be ruled out. As a result, the Japanese government was under pressure from different quarter to reconsider its decision of imposing punitive sanctions against the country. The simultaneous decision to lift sanctions imposed on India as well as a natural outcome as the pair of sanctions was imposed at the same time for the same offense of carrying out nuclear test.

As the Japanese economic sanctions imposed on two South Asian countries were more of symbolic in nature than effectiveness on the countries concerned, the Japanese government obviously wanted to utilize the opportunity of announcing the removal of such sanctions as a diplomatic card that would help lifting the image of Tokyo as an important player involved in the process of finding a solution to the Afghan problem. From that point the announcement of the decision to lift the sanctions probably served the purpose in a much better way than the sanctions itself.

What next in Afghanistan?

SHAMEEM AKHTAR

THE round-the-clock bombing of Afghan cities by the Anglo-US warplanes and the admission by the US defence secretary and the British prime minister that it was almost impossible to capture Osama bin Laden alive or occupy Kandahar should bring home to Washington the bitter truth that there is no instant military solution to complex political problems in Afghanistan.

It was perhaps owing to this realization that diplomatic initiatives have been made in Islamabad with a view to forging a broad-based coalition of forces of all persuasions in that embattled country. The envoy of the 87-year-old exiled ex-ruler, Zahir Shah, Hedayat Arsala, conferred with Pakistan's rulers about the formation of a government in Afghanistan and they together hammered out a peace formula that envisages the setting up of a transitional administration preparatory to the establishment of a multi-ethnic government that might also include certain moderate elements among the Taliban. The royal emissary is overly optimistic about winning over a section of those now aligned with the Taliban.

He also revealed that Zahir Shah and the Northern Alliance had agreed to form a supreme council which would convene a Loya Jirga meeting in Kabul to decide about the formation of a government of national reconciliation.

On the other hand, the Russian president lost no time in seizing the opportunity presented by the Taliban's predicament. He rushed from Shanghai, where he had gone to attend the APEC summit, to Dushanbe to meet the Tajik Presi-

dent, Imamoli Rakhmanov, and Burhanuddin Rabbani, the head of the ousted Mujahideen government.

On October 22, in a joint statement made at the tripartite conference, Rabbani was appointed president and General Fahim defence minister. The Russian president demanded that the Taliban should surrender and promised technical, military and economic assistance to the Northern Alliance on an emergency basis. Needless to say, Iran also backs the move.

It seems that Russia, Iran and Tajikistan want to restore the ousted Rabbani government to power in Kabul after the defeat of the Taliban at the hands of the US. For the present Moscow has been using the US as the cat's paw in Afghanistan. Certainly, this arrangement conflicts with Islamabad's plan to have a friendly government in Kabul, possibly under Zahir Shah. This seems acceptable to the US.

By proclaiming the legitimacy of the Rabbani government, Russia wants its hard-core supporters in the Northern Alliance to occupy a dominant position in the country's future coalition government. Until its operation, Washington had kept a distance from the Alliance in the hope that Taliban may come round to its side but they didn't.

Now, the US has been supplying weapons to the Northern Alliance and its commando force has been fighting shoulder to shoulder with them against the Taliban.

The bombing raids have been providing cover to the Alliance forces so that they may capture Mazar-i-Sharif and Kabul. In short, America has cultivated ties with the Northern Alliance but it is difficult for Washington to wean them away

from Russia.

To the extent the Taliban irritant should be removed, the US, Russia and China have a common cause but it is difficult to say if this narrow consensus based on expediency could be lasting. Russia has not sent its forces to Afghanistan but has allowed its protectorates, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, to grant bases to American forces for ground assault on the Taliban.

For its part, Pakistan is providing logistic and intelligence support for the American operations in Afghanistan. This could have provided sufficient leverage to Islamabad on Washington in influencing the government-making process for Afghanistan. But this is not so. The US has been publicly cold-shouldering Pakistan from the moment George Bush rejected General Musharraf's expectation that the American action would be brief to Colin Powell's latest announcement that Islamabad would not be allowed a veto in the formation of the future government in Afghanistan.

The attitude of Russia and America shows that the big powers are not going to allow a regional power such as Pakistan to establish its sphere of influence in a strategic region. If the American and Russian interests in the region do not clash, there is a likelihood of their agreeing to a neutral status for Afghanistan which had existed following the Anglo-Russian agreement of 1907. This strategic equation was disturbed by Daud's Moscow-backed coup in 1973, which ousted King Zahir Shah and culminated in Afghanistan's eventual fall into the Soviet orbit.

As it is, the US has extended its tentacles to Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, the soft underbelly of Russia, and if the reported deal between King Zahir Shah and America about the grant of bases to the US in Badakhshan is correct, the post-Taliban Afghanistan would cease to be a neutral state. Entrenched in Badakhshan, the US will be able to monitor China's nuclear plant in the nearby Xinjiang province. Never before had the West penetrated so deep into Central Asia.

With a compliant government in Kabul, America would get the concession agreement between Pakistan, Afghanistan and Turkmenistan for the laying of a gas pipeline amended to include the US company, UNOCOL, in the project.

China for the moment is excluded from the government-making process for Afghanistan. Enough for Beijing that the Taliban irritant is to be removed, enabling it to put down the separatist militancy in its volatile western province but it would soon discover that the US presence in the region could be a greater irritant than the Taliban.

In all this strategic calculus what is omitted is the reality on the ground in Afghanistan. The Taliban resistance has hardened and the morale of its forces

remains undiminished while the West is now being apologetic about the extent of civilian casualties and the destruction of the county's fragile infrastructure caused by its indiscriminate use of lethal weapons such as missiles and cluster bombs.

There has erupted a groundswell of opinion throughout the world against targeting civilian population, causing an exodus of Afghan refugees. The horrific consequences of the US offensive in Afghanistan have almost eclipsed the September 11 New York World Trade Centre carnage.

In the midst of the on-going war there can be no negotiations about the formation of the future government of Afghanistan. Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Turkey have realized the inadvisability of foreign interference in the formation of a "broad-based" government in Afghanistan.

They would much rather have the Afghans themselves evolve such a government by an intra-Afghan dialogue. This calls for sustained negotiations among all the parties. The recent conference convened by Syed Ahmad Gilani, a Zahir Shah loyalist, in Peshawar was not representative of all segments of Afghan opinion. It was seen as stage-managed.

It may be recalled that the UN-sponsored peace process known as the Six-plus Two had been already under way involving the Taliban and the Northern Alliance but it was derailed by the US which chose to intervene in the civil war on behalf of one of the adversaries. It is high time the stalled talks were resumed, but first the US must stop its savage operations and withdraw its forces from the region.

Courtesy: The Dawn of Pakistan.

Afghanistan: after Taliban what?

SUBA CHANDRAN

IT is believed that peace will be established once the Taliban regime is overthrown in Afghanistan. Formation of a broad-based national government, either under King Zahir Shah or under the UN, the West feels, would be the first step in that direction. But the ethnic polarization, tribal nature and involvement of outside powers are factors that militate against future stability in Afghanistan.

First, the main opposition to a post-Taliban Afghanistan would obviously come from the Taliban itself. The present war against the Taliban regime, the West believes, would topple them, result in defections, but would not remove them from the Afghan scene. True, there may be defections, but the core leadership of Taliban would remain intact. The Islamic Council or the Supreme Shura is a closely-knit group, and from the beginning, the Taliban have never allowed defectors to become a part of it. This Council is largely made up of people from Kandahar and they would remain loyal till the end to their leader Mullah Omar. The Taliban is certain to oppose any framework that might be imposed after its removal. They have enough firepower to sustain guerrilla warfare for a long period.

Secondly, Pakistan will not abandon the Taliban. Any political setup, led either by the Northern Alliance or by King Zahir Shah, will not be in the interests of Pakistan, hence it would not support them. Taliban would be Pakistan's choice to create problems for any future government in Afghanistan.

Besides its national interests, internal pressures, especially from the *Jamiat Ulama-i-Islam* (JUI)-led fundamentalist parties will force Pakistan to support the Taliban. The JUI propped up the Taliban and is its most ardent supporter inside Pakistan. Even if the future government in Afghanistan is acceptable to Pakistan, it will support the Taliban to gain leverage over its policies. Thirdly, the Northern Alliance, which is considered as an option to lead a broad based government will never be accepted by the *Pashtuns*. The Northern Alliance comprises of

and his continued attack on the government led by Rabbani that resulted in the Taliban gaining control.

Besides, there is no consensus within the Alliance due to several personal clashes within it. Dostum, who has shifted his allegiance frequently in the past, will never be trusted by any of the leaders of the Alliance. Secondly, the Northern Alliance has influence in select ethnic enclaves in the north and the west and has no popular support in the south, especially among the *Pashtuns*.

how long would the international community led by the US be interested in establishing a peaceful society inside Afghanistan? Once the primary interest of the US capturing Osama bin Laden and toppling the Taliban regime is achieved, it is unlikely that the US would continue its efforts. Once the media shifts its attention after the current crisis is over, the international community would focus on other issues.

three major groups *Jamiat-e-Islami*, *Hizb-I-Wahdad-I-Islami* and *Junbish-I-milli-yi Islami-yi Afghanistan* representing the Tajiks of northern Afghanistan, *Shiite Hazaras* and the *Uzbeks*. There is no *Pashtun* leader of any stature in the Northern Alliance. Hekmatyar, the notable leader among the *Pashtuns*, could not share power with the Rabbani government (the leaders of the present Northern Alliance) in the aftermath of the Najibullah regime's downfall in 1992. In fact, it was the reluctance of Hekmatyar

Fourthly, Zahir Shah, being propped up by the West, seems a viable choice only from outside the country; the reality inside Afghanistan is different. Zahir Shah left Afghanistan in 1973 after the coup by his cousin Daud and never returned. It is doubtful whether the *Pashtun* community will accept him, let alone the other communities. Even inside Pakistan, there is little support for the Shah to return.

Fifthly, the type of government that could be set up in Afghanistan and whether it would be accepted by the Afghan community needs to

be analyzed. Afghan society is primarily a tribal and feudal society governed by local customs and tribal practices. Intra-tribal loyalties are stronger than any pan-Afghan sentiments. Introducing a democratic political setup would be counter productive, as has happened in the past. The Communists under the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) attempted to establish a modern Afghanistan, but the rural population turned against them.

If democracy is not the answer, would a monarchy yield better results? For a long time, Afghanistan was ruled by the monarchs. In the future, with Western military support and non-intervention from neighboring states, especially Pakistan and Iran, a monarch will be able to establish order, but not peace. The Afghan nation consists of a number of sub-nations that a pan-Afghan government may not be easy to establish.

Finally, how long would the international community led by the US be interested in establishing a peaceful society inside Afghanistan? Once the primary interest of the US capturing Osama bin Laden and toppling the Taliban regime is achieved, it is unlikely that the US would continue its efforts. Once the media shifts its attention after the current crisis is over, the international community would focus on other issues.

The fall of Taliban is inevitable. But it may not result in peace coming to Afghanistan.

Courtesy: IPCS web site. The author is Research Officer at IPCS, New Delhi.