

Policy for the defence of Bangladesh

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BA NGLADESH still runs many of its prime institutions without national direction. One among them is the Defence.

As it appears, in spite of much of discussions, the country is yet to formulate a defence policy that is so vital for the functioning of our defence forces. It may be mentioned at the outset that the defence forces of Bangladesh, one of the most well organised institutions of the country, now acclaimed world over, were raised from the ashes of Liberation War. According to Professor Moritz Jenowitz, Bangladesh forces are a perfect example of 'Army of Liberation'. Since liberation, Bangladesh Armed Forces has roughed through turbulent waters. The growth was devoid of sustained national support. No attempt was made by any government to give the forces a sense of direction by formulating a national defence policy.

However, the mechanism under which this powerful state organ's function, is less understood by many that matter in national life. A nation, having a formidable defence force, running without a policy can be catastrophic. It is a pity that unlike other countries of South Asia, we do not have many specialised scholars who could counsel on security and national defence. There seems to be less counselling, let alone policy guidance to defence forces to discharge its duty within the given framework, both in war and peace.

We need to formulate a defence policy and ensure its execution without delay.

However, recent reports suggest that the 'parliamentary Standing Committee

on the Defence Ministry has been asked by the government to 'formulate' outline policy. Nothing further has been revealed. But the question remains, is 'parliamentary committee' is the right forum? Answer is no. The responsibility should be given to a specially convened ministerial committee for preparing the outline to be approved by a suggested Cabinet Committee for Defence, a forum Bangladesh is yet to have. Asking how a defence policy is made is easy, but answering the question is far from simple.

What needs to be understood is what all the policy means and how to go about with the defence of the country. Every sovereign country in the world maintains armed forces, apparently except Costa Rica, yet it has some arrangement of defence within its system. The organisation of the defence forces is constitutional. Like any other policy of the country defence policy is formulated by the policy makers i.e. the politicians with the input from the technocrat.

This is the basic understanding and also to note that defence policy is a part of overall national security policy that embraces all aspect of a nation that makes a nation secured within and from out side dominance and dominance of all kind.

But what do we mean by defence policy? It involves broad political question such as 'how much is enough to deter adversaries from mounting threats to one's national security?' The defence policy also provides a guideline to run the forces under civilian control. To achieve the end, i.e. formulation of policy, we need to establish a recognised forum where policy is worked out. In a democratic setting the higher defence organi-

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sation at the highest level works out the policy, for execution down the channel, and the Services Headquarters are the lowest formation in that rung.

Almost in all democracies the cabinet committee or equivalent is charged with formulation of the policy to attain national objective in the field of defence. The chief executive heads the Cabinet Committee. Other essential members are Defence, Foreign, and Finance, Industries and Home ministers. Joint Chief of Staff, Services Chiefs and the secretary of defence are essentially the technocrat members who would provide the input and upon whom would then rest the execution of the policy. This is the highest body or can be termed the highest defence organisation whose essential tasks are the formulation, alteration and provision of the policy. The apex body at this level also decides, if not decided earlier, the military system that the country would adopt or change thereupon. Any change in military system then would need to be approved by the parliament.

The policy formulations heavily depends on the financial ability, industrial base, and foreign policy and decision-making structures and, last but not the least, the determination of the nation to remain sovereign.

A total war if envisaged within the policy would then be based on functioning of war ministry, sustained financial ability, mobilisation, strategic stock piling, increasing association with development of industry, science and technology for the prosecution of the war. The foreign policy of the country plays an important part in the policy where either coalition or alliances are made ingredient of the policy. Finally, the strategic environment is the most influencing factor in formulation of the policy for each type of country. One after two of the South Asian countries went nuclear that changed the definition of South Asia in strategic sense and the other is after 9/11 war against terror at our doorstep. However, developing countries may not go for total war but limited one; in that case a limitation has to

be stipulated that would then call for to compensate the industrial shortfall, financial ability, war stamina etc. For these nations their foreign policy and international standing is taken into consideration. We are in the last categories of the countries.

The relationships between domestic and international politics also remain at the core of policymaking, particularly a deterrent-based defence. Meaning that high level maintenance of deterrent armed forces its readiness, availability in peace time for quick response in traditional sense has its own special impact on the domestic politics. For example every budget year the government come under sharp critical views of defence expenditure of such forces. Thus financial burden also determines the policy that is sought to defend the country. Therefore, domestic policy may feed into defence policy making.

Defence policy however is not simply about the acquisition and maintenance of military force: it is also about its use.

Let us now discuss the implementing body that also can be charged with adopting strategy for defence within the ambit of defence policy. This can be termed as Defence Committee headed by the Minister for Defence. The Minister, with Joint Chief of Staff, Services Chiefs, Defence and Defence Production Division chiefs as members, chairs the Defence Committee. The primary task is to work out the strategy to meet the policy aim and objective, co-ordinate, prioritise the defence need, provision of budget for each service, procurement of weapons that are needed and other subjects related to the attainment of optimum standard. This also provides the forum for Service Chiefs to submit their views on the policy. This committee however, remains responsible to the Cabinet Committee. The Defence Committee ensures the civilian control of the forces. The committee also acts as highest body for defence management. There could be several other committees working under Defence Committee such as joint Intelligence Committee, paramilitary forces committee and many others.

In the continuation of the entire policy formulation and the implementation, most of the countries maintain another higher organisation at the higher level of services headquarters i.e. Joint Services Headquarters headed by a Joint Chief. In many countries the Joint Chief acts as the principal adviser to the Supreme Command in case of emergency and remains adviser to all committees including the Defence Committee. One of the main tasks that the Joint Chiefs Secretariat works out is the Joint Strategy to achieve the aim as stipulated in the Defence Policy.

Administration of each force however,

remains within the preview of the respective services. We are still without a defence policy. It would not be overstatement if one mentions that a nation's foreign and Defence policy cannot grow unless both are made complementary to each other. Our ambivalent foreign policy does not even recognise that threats, direct or indirect, exist. Our foreign policy does not even recognise that interstate relationship is undergone a drastic change within the region. Let us admit we do not have a tangible foreign policy or any Defence Policy, though the nation is maintaining a moderate size Armed Forces, which is well trained, internationally recognised and conscious of global strategy.

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Absence of policy and strategy negated the prioritisation of the basic needed equipment for national defence.

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Iraq and Vietnam compared

MUMTAZ IQBAL

ON 5 April 2004 just over a year after US invaded Iraq when things were not going too well for Washington US Senator Ted Kennedy thundered in the US Senate that "Iraq is George Bush's Vietnam."

Bush's response came a week later. On 13 April, he claimed "the analogy is false" and that it "... sends the wrong message to our troops and send the wrong message to the enemy."

Wrapping oneself tightly around the protective mantle of patriotism is something US presidents are wont to do whenever they are in trouble. Johnson and Nixon regularly panned critics of their Vietnam policies as unpatriotic and giving aid and comfort to the enemy. Bush is merely emulating their stellar example.

So how do the US wars in Iraq and Vietnam compare?

ORIGINS OF THE WARS

Both wars essentially were the products of US hubris, a belief that the superpower's military strength would sweep everything before it and yield the result sought. Within this overall theme, the ostensible purpose of the wars and the route the US took to launch them varied in some instances and overlapped in others.

Washington went to war in Vietnam in incremental doses within the Cold War context to contain and reverse the spread of communist influence. The US repeatedly upped the ante to match the robust riposte by Hanoi in response to provocations initiated from and by Washington.

Despite OSS - CIA's predecessor - contacts with Ho Chi Minh's Viet Minh forces in WWII, because of the imperatives of US containment policy, the US supported France's effort to reestablish its control in Indochina after 1945 and was financing about 80% of Paris's colonial military expenditure by the time of Dien Bien Phu in May 1954.

Thereafter, US became the paramount power in South Vietnam, and bent its energies and expended its treasure in establishing a puppet government; aborting the 1956 elections; and progressively increasing its military presence - initiated by Kennedy (23,300) but vastly expanded under Johnson (0.5 million) - till it peaked at 542,000 GIs in 1969 under Nixon.

Johnson resorted to an outright and deliberate fabrication - that three N. Vietnamese torpedo boats had launched an "unprovoked attack" on the US destroyer Maddox on 2 August 1964-- to get the US Congress to pass the infamous Gulf of Tonkin Resolution on 6 August 1964 which paved the way for a substantial escalation in Vietnam (H.R. McMaster: Dereliction of Duty, p.134).

In a similar tawdry fashion, Bush callously and deliberately fused the revanchist mood in the US after 9/11 with abiding US geopolitical lust for influence and oil. Using and inflating scare tactics about Saddam's so-called WMD to elicit Congressional approval, he invaded Iraq on 19 March 2003.

Once bitten, twice shy. Evidently, this aphorism is unfamiliar to the august US Congress. It's not at all shy at being bitten twice and in authorizing wars against distant weak non-white third world countries, so long as the conflicts occurred far from America's shores.

Taking the 1954 Geneva Accords as the starting point, it took the US about a decade to transform itself from a financier of a puppet regime to becoming a full-fledged occupier of South Vietnam. And another decade passed before the bulk of the GIs left (1973).

In Iraq, the period from contemplating invasion to actual attack was much shorter-

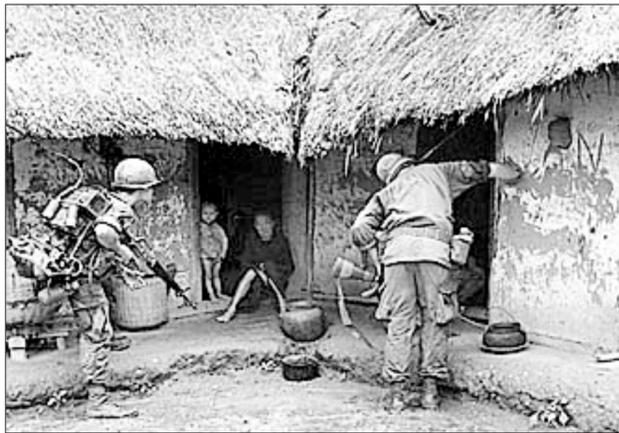
about 18 months from 9/11. The shooting war lasted three weeks, with the post-invasion Occupation being a squalid and violent work in progress for the 140,000 GIs in Iraq. When the US will leave Iraq is anybody's guess.

The disparity in the time frames of the two wars reflects the differences in the international situation surrounding the two conflicts and possibly the fact that we now live in a wired global world where events and opinion, action and reaction, tend to move much faster than earlier.

NATURE OF WARFARE

The war against the Americans was one of national liberation for the Vietnamese and was as much political as military. They were well prepared to wage this Second Indochina War using the experience gleaned from besting the French in the First (1946-54).

The Vietnamese pursued a strategy of unconventional warfare the war of a thousand cuts. They deliberately avoided a headlong fight with the better equipped US forces except to make a point e.g. inflicting casualties on US forces at the Ia Drang



Same army, same tactics--different context.

PHOTO INTERNET

Valley (November 1965) to show that GIs were not supermen, and the Tet Offensive (January 1968) to illustrate the fragile and tenuous political hold of Saigon.

Despite the lavish use of their formidable firepower, the bombs US dropped in Vietnam far exceeded the tonnage the Allies threw at Germany in WWII! The Americans' biggest problem was that they didn't have a cause to match that of the Vietnamese. They were prepared to take horrendous casualties in defending their country. The Americans weren't.

Washington's talk of fighting communism and falling dominoes had a brittle appeal against the motivation and staying power of Vietnamese nationalism. This was shored up by the substantial material and diplomatic support Hanoi received from the USSR and PRC, despite the Sino-Soviet split. In the final analysis, however, it was the Vietnamese who did the fighting and dying.

The US conducted the war in Vietnam essentially unilaterally against mounting international and domestic public criticism that slowly mobilised into an effective anti-war movement and forced Johnson to withdraw from the US presidential election on 31 March 1968 ('I shall not seek, and I will not accept, the nomination of my party for another term as your President.')

This mobilisation was fueled and lubricated both by Washington's failure to impose its will on Hanoi and by mounting US casualties over 58,000 Americans were

killed in Vietnam.

US's Iraq invasion was also a unilateralist operation launched from the outset against intense and extensive worldwide opposition dramatically manifested at the UN and in mammoth peace marches in many capitals. The war, conventional in nature, lasted three weeks, with the US forces routing the Iraqis fairly easily, as expected.

The Vietnamese fought a protracted war that was popular and total, involving all sections of society and mobilizing the entire resources of a poor peasant society.

Iraq resistance differs in that it's splintered both as to participants mostly Sunni and Shia (Sunni heartland around Baghdad), lacks a sanctuary like N. Vietnam, and receives little external material or financial assistance (any Iranian and Syrian help is certainly nowhere near what Hanoi got from Moscow and Beijing).

In fact, two (Shias and Kurds, especially the latter) out of Iraq's three main ethnic communities are not entirely unhappy, for their own reasons, with the US invasion. This paved the way for their participation in political power hitherto dominated by Sunnis-- for the first time in Iraq's history.



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Shias and Kurds have cooperated with their US Occupiers to hold national elections on 30 January 2005. This ushered in a new government that is a joint venture of these two groups. Its weakness is that it is a progeny of US bayonets and relies on US muscle for survival.

Thus, unlike Vietnam where US efforts to create a legitimate indigenous government in Saigon (now Ho Chi Minh City) through elections invariably failed, Washington's endeavours in Iraq to establish a political structure in Iraq have been more productive.

Accordingly, the image of GIs in Iraq has changed subtly over the past few months. The prevailing perception of US forces as an invading army of occupation has been diluted somewhat. It is now also regarded as a necessary if unwelcome underwriter of the ongoing Iraqi political process and its faltering anti-insurgency efforts. In effect, the full-time poacher has successfully reinvented himself as a part-time gamekeeper.

But the post election environment has seen little reduction in the frequency and scale of insurgent attacks. Overall, the astonishing features of Iraq's post-invasion resistance, even though it's not a nationwide enterprise, are its intensity and durability, both of which have been a nasty surprise for the US.

A striking feature of the resistance is the tactical use of suicide bombings on a fairly regular and sustained basis that is creating a chaotic security situation.

Though the bombings kill more Iraqis than GIs a point not without some comfort to Washington-- these severely embarrass the US Command in Baghdad, which, like its Saigon counterpart, doesn't have much of an idea of the enemy or his motivation.

Even worse, the insurgency's focus on Shia targets is beginning to fray further the long-standing fragile Shia-Sunni relations, raising the nasty spectre of a civil war.

The Americans view this prospect as a mixed blessing. It validates their continued stay in Iraq but raises questions about the efficacy of their presence. If GIs can't stop the insurgency, complain Iraqis, then what's their point of staying in Iraq?

The indulgence in suicide bombing suggests a fairly reliable and motivated supply of bombers. Who they are and why they are willing to blow themselves up are the intriguingly enduring mysteries of Iraqi resistance. To say that they are terrorists, as the US claims, merely begs the question of why they do what they do.

Press and anecdotal reports suggest that some or even a major part of the suicide bombers may be non-Iraqis. What's their motivation to die for a cause in a foreign land?

Is it religious motivation (fighting the infidel?) Is it secular and virulent anti-Americanism resulting from US Occupation of Iraq? Or is it a fusion of both considerations?

The answers to these questions, if and when they emerge later, will be revealing and interesting.

SUMMING UP

Vietnam and Iraq suggest that it's in the genes of an imperial superpower to undertake costly military expeditions overseas thus sparing its own people and territory firsthand from the ravages of war pursuant to what it perceives to be its national interest.

In this process, superpower leaders routinely resort to manipulating facts and blithely lying to influence domestic public and legislative opinion to sanction war.

The US debacle in Vietnam or the stout resistance by Vietnamese, to put it another way shows the limitations of waging an illegitimate war by a powerful entity for unclear goals that disregard the wishes of the people being fought over.

But, in proving this point, the Vietnamese paid a horribly high price for their success (three million dead). The US was left nursing a "syndrome" in not getting its way. Superpowers and their victims experience quite different levels of physical suffering and mental anguish.

Iraq is unlikely to be a repetition of Vietnam. The US doesn't face anywhere near the level of determined opposition that Hanoi stitched together.

Moreover, Iraqis are ambivalent about the fallout from the US invasion of their country. Not all of them are united in actively resisting the US forces. This lessens the pressure on Washington to cut and run, particularly if the flow of body bags remains at tolerable levels. Despite these caveats, it's clear that the US is mired in mud, if not a quagmire, in Iraq. But it's not yet bad enough to inflame domestic US opinion in the way that Vietnam did. What isn't so clear is how and when normal conditions will return to Iraq, enabling GIs to leave.

But normality can't come too soon for the Iraqis. They have stoically suffered a lot under a tyrannical dictator and an unscrupulous invader. They deserve a much-needed respite from their long run of bad governance.

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Vietnam War predominantly an American show?

BILLY I AHMED

Although the history of any region is the product of a complex mix of culture and circumstance, in many ways, for Vietnam, geography is destiny. Vietnam's geographical position relative to China has been paramount in shaping its political and cultural history. On the map, Vietnam is directly below China -- an elongated, 1,000-mile-long, containing in its northern loop the great population center of the Red River delta and in its southern loop that of the Mekong River delta.

The Vietnamese nation arose from the many clans and communities of the Viet peoples, stretching from the area of present-day Shanghai down to the Red River delta, where Hanoi is now located.

Vietnam commands the South China Sea and occupies a central strategic position with respect to present-day India, Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, and southern China. To the Japanese and Europeans who were invading Southeast Asian waters in the 16th century, Vietnam had even more geographic than commercial appeal.

In the 16th century, the Portuguese were the first Europeans to enter the area. France established its influence early in the 19th century, and within 80 years, conquered the three regions into which the country was then divided: Cochinchina in the south, Annam in the central region, and Tonkin in the north.

France first unified Vietnam in 1887, when a single governor-generalship was created, followed by the first physical links between north and south, a rail and road system. Even at the beginning of World War II, however, there were internal differences among the three regions. Japan took over military bases in Vietnam in 1940, and a pro-Vichy French administration remained until 1945. Veteran Communist leader Ho Chi Minh organised an independence movement known as the Vietminh to exploit the confusion surrounding France's weakened influence in the region. At the end of the war, Ho's followers seized Hanoi and declared a short-lived republic, which ended with the arrival of French forces in 1946.

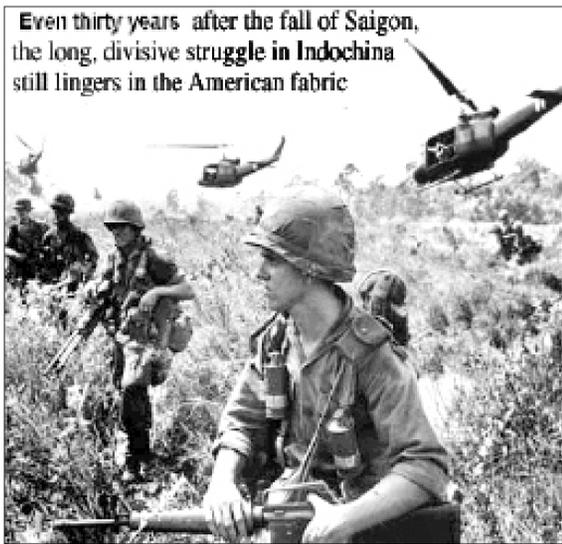
Paris proposed a unified government within the French Union under the former Annamite emperor, Bao Dai. Cochinchina and Annam accepted the proposal, and Bao Dai was proclaimed emperor of all Vietnam in 1949. Ho and the Vietminh withheld support, and the revolution in China gave them the outside help needed for a war of resistance against French and Vietnamese troops armed largely by a United States worried about cold war Communist expansion.

A bitter defeat at Dien Bien Phu in northwest Vietnam on May 5, 1954 broke the French military campaign and resulted in the division of Vietnam. In the new South, Ngo Dinh Diem, premier under Bao Dai, deposed the monarch in 1955 and made himself president. Diem used strong US backing to create an authoritarian regime that suppressed all opposition but could not eradicate the Northern-supplied Communist Viet Cong.

A brief look at the war itself reveals that it started out rather benignly with the sending of American advisors to assist the South Vietnamese train its growing army. The stated objective was to allow the South Vietnamese Army to resist aggression from the North and to preserve their sovereignty as a democratic nation.

By the late 1960s, the American government realizing that the conflict would be endless entered into negotiations with the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese in Paris. As a show of good faith, the American combat strategy evolved into a mostly defensive operation. The resultant deleterious effect on troop morale made the situation on the ground worse.

As time passed and American administrations changed, the roles changed until it became an American led and financed conflict. Skirmishing grew into a full-scale war, with escalating US involvement. The South Vietnamese received financial aid from a number of



Even thirty years after the fall of Saigon, the long, divisive struggle in Indochina still lingers in the American fabric

nations; and Thailand, South Korea, the Philippines, Australia and others contributed manpower. However, the war was predominately an American show.

From 1946 until 1954, the Vietnamese had struggled for their independence from France during the First Indochina War. At the end of this war, the country was temporarily divided into North and South Vietnam. North Vietnam came under the control of the Vietnamese Communists who had opposed France and who aimed for a unified Vietnam under Communist rule. Vietnamese who had collaborated with the French controlled the South. In 1965 the United States sent in troops to prevent the South Vietnamese government from collapsing. Ultimately, however, the United States failed to achieve its goal, and in 1975 Vietnam was reunified under Communist control; in 1976 it officially became the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. During the conflict, approximately 3 to 4 million Vietnamese on both sides were killed, in addition to another 1.5 to 2 million Lao and Cambodians who were drawn into the war.

The Vietnam War was the longest military conflict in U.S. history. The hostilities in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia claimed the lives of more than 58,000 Americans. Another 304,000 were wounded. The losses to the Vietnamese people were appalling. The financial cost to the United States comes to something over US\$150 billion. The Vietnam War was a military struggle fought in Vietnam from 1959 to 1975, involving the North Vietnamese and the National Liberation Front (NLF) in conflict with United States forces and the South Vietnamese army.

On April 9, 1975, Hanoi's troops marched within 40 miles of Saigon, the South's capital. South Vietnam's president Thieu resigned on April 21 and fled. Gen. Duong Van Minh, the new president, surrendered Saigon on April 30, ending a war.

From an American viewpoint, the Vietnam War is not well understood. Even though it was part of the American daily life for some fifteen years, there is no consensus as to its purpose and result. Some Americans believe that Vietnam was a national policy blunder costing some 58,000 American lives and billions of tax dollars. That it divided the country at a time when it most needed to be unified leaving scars that are yet to be healed. Others believe the war was a noble cause similar to the United Nations effort that kept South Korea free. The war in Vietnam became the most unpopular war ever fought by the US government. Opposition to it grew into an "anti-war movement." The civil rights movement; at its height in the early and mid-1960s, created a climate for protest.

The toll in suffering, sorrow, in rancorous national turmoil can never be tabulated. No one wants ever to see America so divided again. And for many of the more than two million American veterans of the war, the wounds of Vietnam will never heal. The war had ended but the pain and confusion remains to this day.

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