

National Security Council: Do we need one?

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SHOULD Bangladesh set up a National Security Council (NSC) as some countries have done?

NSCs are formed either to frame or debate high level security issues revolving around foreign policy in its widest sense, or to institutionalize the military's role in politics.

America's NSC, the granddaddy of all, was established September 1947 to coordinate foreign and defense policies to contain USSR and spread of communism (Cold War). The CIA's successor of Office of Strategic Services (OSS) -- was set up the same time to spy abroad.

CIA data were a key input to the actionable intelligence underlying NSC's deliberations. Over time, NSC broadened its focus to include matters like energy security and terrorism. In February 1977, Carter dubbed US access to ME energy as the moral equivalent of war (MEOOW). Terror became pivotal after 9/11.

Kissinger is probably the most well known US NS advisor. His path to the Nobel Peace Prize is littered with corpses e.g. Bangladesh, Cambodia and Chile.

The Security Council of the Russian Federation is an executive level agency under Putin that coordinates national security. It deals with external issues e.g. Shanghai Cooperation Council and thorny internal ones like Chechnya.

PRC's secretive Central Military Commission (CMC) coordinates NS issues with the Communist Party apparatus. CMC is a constitutional body created in 1982 to formalize the military's role within the state. This was a response to Cultural Revolution's turmoil (1966-76) when the PLA was the sole functioning national institution.

Supreme NSC, founded 1989 under the Constitution (Art 176), deals with Iran's nuclear program that is the direct responsibility of supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khomeini. NSC's secretary Ali Larjani is Tehran's chief nuclear negotiator. Iran's nuclear effort could lead to war with the USA and its allies.

Israeli NSC formed by arch-hawk PM Benjamin Netanyahu in 1999 to deal with multifarious security issues is understandable since Israel is a permanent garrison state, even though Tel Aviv's greatest military victories happened before 1999.

BJP's saffron-nationalists established India's NSC in November 1998 as an apex agency to review political, economic, energy and strategic security aspects that work their way up through three tiers: Strategic Policy Group; NS Advisory Board and Joint Intelligence Center. This complicated structure reflects India's heterogeneous security concerns or South Asian love for bureaucratization. It's unclear how effective NSC really is.

Turkish and Pakistan NSCs formalized their military's role in national life.

Turkey created the NSC in 1961 under the Constitution (Art.118) following the 1960 military coup to integrate military influence in politics. NSC's role was strengthened in 1982 after the 1980 coup. In 1992, Chief of the General Staff stated that Turkey is a military state.

As Turkey sought to join the EU, reforms have reduced NSC's high profile. In August 2004, a civilian was appointed as its Secretary General. The military exercises were influenced through civilian fronts.

In Pakistan the NSC Act of 2004 created the NSC that brings the military formally into politics. This is cosmetic surgery because the army rules. Pakistan like Prussia is an

Setting up a NSC under Emergency would send a wrong signal to the country. This would institutionalize the services role, like in Turkey and Pakistan, in national affairs. This is unnecessary and undesirable. This conclusion is attested by dictator Ershad's furtive dalliance with NSC. In 1980, as Deputy Chief of Army Staff, he floated the NSC concept. This was discussed in a 1978 paper by then Major Sakhawat Hossain attending the Mirpur Staff College. Ershad's timing was significant. Ziaur Rahman had been killed; Sattar regime was feeling its way. For personal aggrandizement, Ershad used the NSC device to usurp power treacherously

army with a state.

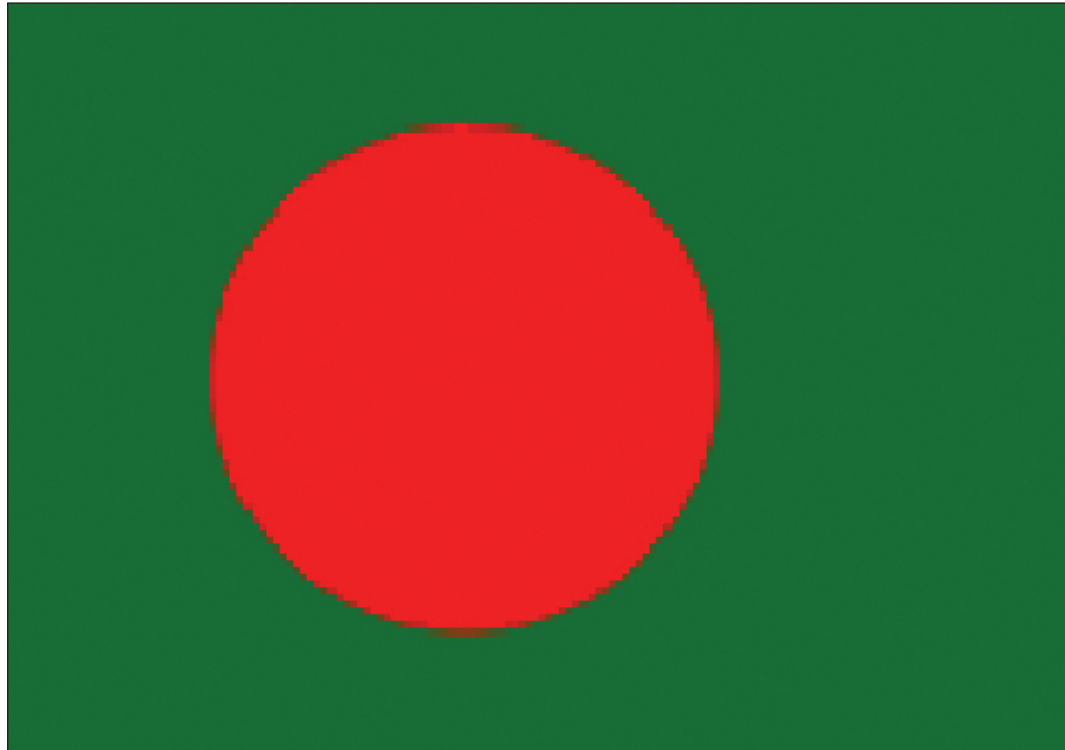
NSC FOR BANGLADESH

The US (superpower), Russia (mini-superpower), PRC and India (aspiring superpowers) set up NSCs because they have global and/or regional interests to protect or manipulate, and deal with threats thereto. Put it another way, they have to manage the threats they pose to their near and distant neighbours in this digital world.

Bangladesh does not share this trait. It's small and poor with a two-product economy (garments and remittances) over which it has little control. A recession in the west and manpower policy changes in various countries would harm us.

Therefore, improving the productivity and cost competitiveness of our RMG industry and work force is vital for our future. In this regard, how does a NSC help? Would it improve the operations of Chittagong Port or the ICD container terminal in Dhaka that's critical for our economy? Bangladesh poses no military threat to anybody. Nor does it face any serious military threat. These scenarios are unlikely to change. This doesn't mean that Bangladesh shouldn't manage its external relations with close and distant countries for maximum benefits or returns. This requires deft diplomacy across the board. But foreign policy considerations that compel the US and others to set up NSCs are missing in our case.

In that event, do internal condi-



tion's warrant setting up a NSC? In his paper National Security Council: The Need of the Hour, Brig. Gen Sakhawat Hossain (ret.) has argued as such, citing CHT insurgency, repeated border clashes with BSF, grenade attack on Hasina in August 2004, coordinated 500 countrywide explosions 12 months later and JMB suicide bombings.

The media made much of the authorities' tardy response to the last three security outrages. This tardiness indicates poor leadership of those running the country then. It also raises questions about these leaders' willingness to find the culprits.

If this perspective is correct, then the belated response is a question of deliberate negli-

gence, not an organisational vacuum or shortcoming that needs to be filled by a NSC. Had NSC existed, could it have performed as expected if the political leadership was unwilling or unable to act? Blame the players, not the coach.

Do we lack institutions and rules to manage security issues that are mainly internal in nature? Some of these issues are stoked by foreigners more out of lazy habit and to justify their budget/existence than any real sense of purpose. If the answer to this question is no, then we must use decisively what we have and strengthen them where necessary. We don't need to throw out the baby with the bath water.

Would a NSC have prevented

the Election Commission's shenanigans that so damaged our polity and made us the world's laughing stock? Has the NSC's absence inhibited action against alleged wrongdoers under the caretaker government?

It's not the absence of institutions like NSC that ushered in the Emergency. It is failed leadership over many years starting from our independence that castrated our laws and institutions.

Mao said that it's not the gun, but the man behind the gun, that matters. Solid manpower at all levels and right equipment are important, not an apex body that adds a bureaucratic layer without achieving anything worthwhile that a cabinet security sub-committee couldn't do.

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As President, Ershad resurrected the NSC concept to shore up his tottering regime. Events overtook his effort. It's a national tragedy he's still around and reportedly eyeing the Presidency. Don't we have any sense of honour or shame? Doesn't Ershad?

He must quit politics. We don't need a NSC for this! It's high time for new faces and voices, not for persons past their prime.

We shouldn't let the seductive siren song of "national security" delude us into taking questionable initiatives. There's no overriding reason to form a NSC to do things that can't be done by sound leadership and existing agencies.

Setting up NSC would be organizational overkill. Its purpose would surely, and rightly, be misunderstood under the current unusual environment that is unsustainable over time, as Turkey's was. Is the uncertain benefit of NSC worth the cost?

The author is a free lancer.

A new era in Nepal begins

BARRISTER HARUN UR RASHID

NEPAL'S political situation has been stabilised and an interim government has been constituted with representatives from Maoists as Ministers. This has been possible because of accommodation from both sides for the interest of the nation.

Both sides were assisted by the UN and other big powers to ensure resolution of the issues that divided them. The Koirala government has taken steps to diffuse the situation by being more democratic in nature, reducing the role of the King to nothing in political and defence matters.

PEACE AGREEMENT

On 21 November, relief swept through Nepal when Maoists and the government concluded a peace deal. Maoist leader, known by his nom de guerre, Prachanda, ('the fierce one', real name Pupsha Kamal Dahal) said after the signing of the peace agreement: "It is the beginning of a new beginning."

The UN Secretary General's Personal Representative, Ian Martin, also signed a crucial agreement that would see that the UN monitors decommissioning of the weapons of rebel and government armies.

The peace deal put an end to a crippling civil war that had raged for 10 years (1996-2006) and reportedly killed about 14,000 people.

MAIN FEATURES OF THE AGREEMENT

- The Maoists will put away their weapons in storehouses to be monitored by the UN
- The Nepalese army will give up an equal number of its weapons and return to the barracks.
- The Maoists will be allowed to enter mainstream politics
- The Maoists will join an all-party interim government that will oversee elections to a Constituent Assembly
- A new Constitution will be formulated which will decide the fate of the 238-year old monarchy.

The peace agreement paves the way for the fulfillment of one of the chief demands of Maoists that people would be able to decide the fate of monarchy when they go to polls next year. The leader of Maoists said that even if the people would decide to retain monarchy, his cadres would continue to peacefully fight for its abolition.

The Kathmandu Post declared in an editorial on 22nd November after the peace deal:

"The peace accord will be a success only if people feel peace in the air. There should therefore be no more extortion, abduction, intimidation, torture, disappearances or any other sort of rights abuse."

INVOLVEMENT OF

THE UN

On 11th January, the Secretary General of the UN submitted a report to the Security Council seeking to establish a full-sized political mission in Nepal to monitor the peace agreement. On 23rd January, the UN Security Council approved the proposal for 12 months and accordingly 186 unarmed would monitor the decommissioning of its military personnel and inspect Maoist cantonments and Nepal Army barracks.

The UN advance team began its work by inspecting the cantonments on January 8. It appears that weapons are being surrendered by both sides in accordance with the peace agreement. This begins a new era and many analysts believe that this would not have occurred without UN's support.

WHY DID MAOISTS EMERGE IN NEPAL?

Maoist insurgencies have resumed in South Asia because of poverty and deprivation of political and social rights after the demise of Chairman Mao and his ideology in China. In India, a loose confederation of Maoist rebels has been active in countryside to win the hearts and minds of ordinary people.

The rebels called themselves "Maoists" (Lal Sena) because they would follow the guidelines of Mao in winning popularity among rural people by being helpful to them. They would promise the poor (about 70% of Nepal's population of approximate 28 million) that under their regime, poor would benefit because they would abolish debts and confiscate private lands of the rich and redistribute among poor peasants.

The Maoists, some of them in combat fatigues with red stars on their caps, others in woollen rags and things have created havoc in government offices and functionaries in rural areas. They even robbed travellers, menacing the vital tourist industry.

With advice and training from Peru's Shining Path and Indian militant communist groups, the rebels' strength had risen to more than 5,000 hardcore armed guerrillas. They had taken more than half the country's 75 districts. They threatened the capital with siege and became a formidable force in two years when King Gyanendra's flawed policy weakened the democratic political parties.

China has disowned the Maoists because such old-fashioned leftism is uncomfortable for the present Chinese leadership that promotes all-out economic growth and private capital.

WHY DID THE MAOISTS CONCLUDE THE PEACE DEAL?

There are many reasons and some of them deserve mention:

First, there has been reportedly severe external pressure from UN,

India and China on cessation of civil war in Nepal because it destabilises the whole region of South Asia. Furthermore, New Delhi regards Nepal as part of its sphere of influence and ordinarily stations a senior Indian army officer (a general) as military adviser to the Embassy.

Second, civil war does not resolve political issues. After conclusion of the peace deal Prachanda reportedly said: " This has given a message to the interna-

Fourth, it has been a "win-win" situation for the Maoists under the peace agreement. The Maoists have not laid down their arms entirely, and agreed to lock up their weapons but are holding on to the keys. This seems to be a great advantage for them. If the politicians do not adhere strictly to the terms of the agreement, they are in a position to resume war. Furthermore, they want their armed cadres to be integrated into a new national army.

soldiers should be released and new recruitment has been prohibited.

Furthermore, there is allegation that Maoists still continue with their abductions, extortion and torture in the countryside. The whereabouts of the missing persons during the armed conflict are not known. The UN High Commissioner Louise Arbor points out that impunity has been a major threat to protection of human rights in Nepal and the peace process largely depends on



tional community and terrorists all over the world that no conflict can be resolved by guns. It can be done by dialogue".

Third, the government of Girija Prasad Koirala in Nepal has been accommodating many of their core demands including an election next year for an assembly that will determine whether Nepal will remain a kingdom and if so, what kind.

Already the monarch's powers have been taken away in almost all spheres in administration.

CONCLUSION

The peace agreement does not automatically guarantee peace. It provides an environment that enables peace. Although Nepalese people hailed the peace agreement, the question is how the Maoists lay aside their arms and discontinue their past violent activities.

Human rights activists in Nepal are raising concern about Maoists' harbouring children as soldiers. Under the peace deal, all child

how well peace incorporates the human rights component.

It is up to all sections of Nepalese society to make peace happen by removing suspicion and old-enmities between government and Maoists.

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Japan's support for the Indo-US nuclear deal: A step towards a safer world

RESHMI KAZI

THE visit of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to Japan in December 2006 marks the beginning of a joint partnership for global and strategic cooperation. This is a significant development as the two largest democracies of Asia will now jointly work towards achieving a nuclear weapons free world, a commitment that was made by Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee and his counterpart Yoshiro Mori in August 2000.

Indo-Japan bilateral ties reached its lowest ebb with India conducting the Pokhran II tests in May 1998. Japan strongly deplored the tests and was quick to apply stringent economic sanctions against India. Since then, both Asian nations have traversed a long distance. The Japan-India Summit in 2000 started the thaw in bilateral ties. Today India holds the distinction of being the largest receiver of Japanese ODA.

While economic opportunities remain a principal factor for strengthening bilateral ties, Indo-Japanese civil nuclear diplomacy can contribute substantially to strengthening relations. Japan's support for the Indo-US nuclear deal, which is now in the final stages of implementation, is considered crucial for India. The importance of nuclear energy to meet the country's requirements is completely accepted in Japan, which presently has 52 commercial nuclear reactors in operation generating 45,740 MW of electricity. Japan ranks third in the world, after the US and France, in nuclear power generation. Nuclear energy provides for approximately 34.6 per cent (FY2001) of Japan's electricity and nuclear energy is likely to remain the principal source of energy on which Japan will continue to depend for a long time.

The passage of the civilian nuclear deal between India and the US, apart from promising immense benefits to its main partners holds considerable advantage for Japan too. The Japanese government has decided to allow its companies to collaborate with India on projects involving construction of nuclear power stations. This would open the Indian markets to Japan for prudent investment opportunities. Civilian nuclear cooperation can also lead to other spin-offs notably collaboration in innovative technological areas like nanotechnology, biotechnology and information technology. Japan can also benefit from India's skilled manpower, low-cost production and a healthy market growth.

Pakistan's clandestine role in transferring nuclear technology under AQ Khan for developing North Korea's nuclear programme is well documented. Japan has considered this regrettable and sought related information from Pakistan for purposes of investigation. Matters could become even more serious with terrorists

operating within Pakistan who nurture intentions of nuclear weapons smuggling. Indo-Japanese cooperation can play a vital role in reigning in "rogue nations" and prevent WMD proliferation.

The strengthening of India-Japan relations can accelerate cooperation on issues of CTBT and FMCT. India has so far refrained from signing these treaties in view of their discriminatory nature. India like Japan supports elimination of nuclear weapons but its main contention is that other nations must pledge the same. India and Japan can play a substantial role to restart negotiations and move towards an early settlement of these treaties.

Manmohan Singh's visit to Tokyo was well timed. It was a major breakthrough for India to achieve Japan's support for the upcoming nuclear deal. Japan's support is expected to evoke similar responses from other NSG members notably the Scandinavian countries who have so far expressed reservations about India being made an exception to the NPT regime. The expected Japanese cooperation would further consolidate India-Japan strategic partnership and spur collaboration in defence and security matters.

India is a stable democratic nation with a clean non-proliferation record. As part of its commitment to the Indo-US nuclear deal it has pledged to put 65 percent of its nuclear reactors under IAEA safeguards that further curtails any risk of nuclear proliferation. It has implemented stringent export control over unlawful trafficking of WMD-related material and technology. India is a responsible state with advanced nuclear technology which has the potential to play a major role in global disarmament. India is also expected to contribute substantially in the ongoing ITER project.

Japan has strong faith in the NPT regime and India not being a signatory to the treaty creates some discomfort. However, what needs to be seriously taken note of is that India achieved its nuclear power status without violating the NPT regime even though it was not a legal party to it. Its strategic programme is embedded on the principles of no-first-use, minimum credible deterrence and unilateral moratorium on nuclear testing. In addition, India's commitment to universal nuclear disarmament remains unshaken, a value that is shared by Japan.

India has growing demands for energy with its growth target pegged at 10 percent over the next decade. To meet its increasing demands, India needs a clean source of energy that will prevent global warming. This being the Year of India-Japan Friendship, Tokyo must support New Delhi's quest for civilian nuclear energy in the interest of Japan, India and the global community.

By arrangement with IPCS, New Delhi.