

Role of the Armed Forces in upholding democracy

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THE People's Republic of Bangladesh emerged on the world map on 16 December 1971 through a historic struggle for national liberation. On September 17, 1974, Bangladesh became the 136th member of the United Nations. While the American Declaration of Independence in 1776 followed a prolonged war with Great Britain, the Bangladesh Declaration of Independence was made on March 26, 1971 and the war, in Oppenheimer's terms followed the Declaration of Independence. The war was fought on certain immutable principles based on an ideology to achieve a space for the Bengalees, who did not succeed in achieving it over the past thousand years.

Looking Back

The 1848 revolutions repudiated 'throne and altar' in Europe. It translated into real life the poetry of Victor Hugo and the Music of Berlioz. The Treaty Settlement of Congress of Vienna was suffocating Europe. Lamartine in some uncertainty said, "We are making the sublimest of poems". The Bengalees fought the war against the unjust settlement of the British. They wanted their space in history. Their inspiration was the poetry of Tagore and the music of Nazrul. Sporadic efforts of Sirajuddowla to Titumir were aborted, but their efforts did not go in vain. We write history on the basis of our past experience. Thus the war was fought on the basic principles of nationalism, democracy, socialism, secularism, human rights and anti-colonialism: the war was a protest against all that the Islamic Republic of Pakistan stood for. It is logical that this was a people's war, and not to be mistaken with "nations-in-arms" war strategy. On the contrary, what Clausewitz argues seems to fit in the Bangladesh experience "the

nation itself rises and takes part in the war and new force comes into being". Add to this what Walter Lippman argues, "A nation must defend its core values". Taken the two thoughts together, with a dose of Barry Buzan, one may conclude that Bangladesh' liberation war was unique as it was a people's war to fight against the 'Wadera'-military compradors of Pakistan to defend its core values, the Bengali values of syncretism in life. But the Bengalee nation's war was natural and spontaneous as against some arguments, which involve conscious training and preparation to face a potential or actual enemy. And in our case, the actual war of ideology and intellect started long time ago culminating in 1971. On March 26, the Bengalee dream came into reality.

When we think about strategy, it automatically involves security. The security I argue about is not embedded in the Westphalian thinking alone, nor is it based only on a post-cold war or post modernist paradigm. Both these approaches appear to be reductionist. And Bangladesh' liberation war was a people's war for a democratic as against a militarist dispensation of Pakistan. Those who fought in the war itself are the real heroes, and those imbued with the spirit of the liberation war in subsequent years are

patriots and they constitute the core personnel of our Defense Forces as their struggle, contribution and love for the country embody the core values, in Lippman's words, of our liberation war. When the true history is written in the tradition of the great German historian Ranke, this thought I believe will be corroborated. It is, therefore, argued that the Bangladesh Defense forces are not a derivative of any Force, and certainly not that of Pakistan. Any suggestion of this kind is not only reductionist - it is also myopic.

A recent research published in the daily SANBAD (dated 24 January 2007) by Syed Borhan Kabir represents, by and large, my thoughts. A short paraphrased version reads like this: during the 80's, the statistics from Cadet College indicates a good number of students from the middle class families got admitted to the Cadet Colleges. Majority of the successful candidates from the Cadet Colleges joined the Armed Forces, considering the financial condition of their parents. Besides, those who pursued higher education in the Universities, Engineering Colleges or Medical Colleges joined the Armed Services: in Education Corps, Engineering Corps and Medical Corps. Many of them are MBAs and PhDs. The Armed Service for them is

attractive and dependable. In this process the Armed Forces have become efficient, modern and forward looking.

The Armed Forces have been

performing duties in aid of civil

administration during national

calamities including the disaster

management, and playing important

role under the UN Peace

Keeping operations around the

world. They have earned good

reputation. When I visited

Mozambique in the late 90's as the

Special Envoy of the Prime

Minister, the President and

Foreign Minister of the country

praised our valiant armed forces in

peacekeeping and nation building,

and described how our boys

helped in building roads and

highways in the war-ravaged

country. When I met President

Mandela the same week in connec-

tion with our silver jubilee

celebration, March 1997, he also

had his praise for our boys. The

story of Bosnia-Herzegovina and

the present Republic of Congo is

no exception.

In light of the above informa-

tion, the twenty first century

defense paradigm of any country

has to be considered in the back-

drop of certain objective reali-

ties. The post cold war and post

modernist calculus should not be the

only measure with which we have

to think about our defense strat-

egy, a country with a per capita

income of only over US\$ 400.00. With one hyper power around, our strategic vision has to be refo-

cused. What is a Defense Policy? Do we have any National Defense Policy? The Defense Policy of a country refers to a process of continuous activities, which a country requires to ensure its national security;

Policy, we don't have any. And a prior condition for moving towards that would require strengthening of civil-military relations (CMR).

It is in the above backdrop that the nation has enthusiastically welcomed the declaration of emergency, with a human face, as per the Constitution, on January 11, 2007. Our valiant defense forces responded to the need to defend democracy and protect the constitution. I am convinced that through their action, the slow but steady progress of democracy will be ensured with the ultimate restoration of democracy and democratic institutions. Cicero was right when he said "Salus Populi Suprema est Lex" (The welfare of the people is the ultimate law). In this process I believe Adam Smith's "moral imagination" will be our guide.

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China's White Paper on "National Defence in 2006"

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CHINA'S military and strategic assessment, "National Defence in 2006", published by Pentagon in late December, is a high-pitched political document that reflects China's reaction to growing Great Power competitiveness.

The White Paper, the fifth since 1998, is largely a response to increasing pressure from Washington. Since President Bush came to power in 2001, the Pentagon has published a series of annual reports presenting the Chinese military as a "threat" to the US. Chinese President Hu Jintao has sought to down play the criticism, saying that his country was engaged in a "peaceful rise".

This latest report provided more detail about the country's military apparatus than previous ones. It provided information about defence spending, the command structure and an overview of military policy.

China's spreading ties with Russia in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) have cut across US ambitions to dominate the Middle East and Central Asia. In Asia, Latin America and Africa, China is engaged in extending its influence, offering aid in return for resources.

The defence report mentions growing concerns in Beijing about the Bush administration's aggression in the Middle East and internationally. Its first chapter assessing China's

"security environment" warned of the "practice of a small number of countries that have intensified their military alliances and resorted to force or threats of force in international action".

The chapter warned explicitly of the danger of a US-led strategic realignment in Asia. "The United States and Japan are strengthening their military alliance in pursuit of operational integration. Japan seeks to revise its constitution and exercise collective self-defence. Its military posture is becoming more external-oriented. The DPRK [North Korea] has launched missile tests and conducted a nuclear test. Thus, the situation on the Korean Peninsula and in North East Asia has become more complex and challenging."

China is extremely apprehensive at the reassurance given by the Bush administration to Japan to play a more belligerent role in North East Asia. China fears that North Korea's nuclear test in October could provide a pretext for Japan to develop nuclear weapons.

The paper precisely named a formal declaration of independence in Taiwan, backed by the US, as the biggest threat to China's national security and territorial integrity. China regards Taiwan as a renegade province and fears moves towards independence would encourage separatist movements elsewhere in China.

domestic unrest.

American analysts' claim have accused the Pentagon's estimates of exaggerating the Chinese "threat" to justify increased US military spending; the pace of China's military modernisation has undoubtedly stepped up since the early 1990s.

Until the 1970s, Mao Zedong's peasant-based PLA was poorly equipped. Its main tactic in the event of US or Soviet aggression was to have a "sea of men" to encircle the invaders. In the 1980s, the US sought to use China as a counterweight to the Soviet Union and actively encouraged Beijing to use the proceeds of "market reform" to modernise its military.

However, minor shift took place in 1990-91, following the collapse of the Soviet Union. The Chinese leadership declared that the PLA had to catch up or go under as the US used its military's superior might to achieve global strategic dominance.

The section in the 2006 White Paper on "National Defence Policy" details China's goal of building a hi-tech military by 2050. The aim is to take "mechanization as the foundation and informationisation as the driving force". The report's central importance is on an "active defence" and the ability to rapidly project a synchronized military force outside China's adjacent region with maximum hi-tech firepower.

Despite its rapid economic growth, its new breed of aircraft, tanks and warships are largely based on copying and extending the limited foreign technologies to which it has access. China has built nuclear-powered submarines, but not a blue-water navy. Its air force is equipped with some precision-guided weapons, but its numerical strength is still based on old-fashioned Soviet jets.

In the area of nuclear weapons, China is far behind the US. The White Paper reiterated the country's official "no first use" nuclear policy and declared that China would not engage in nuclear arms race. But the document has little to say about the country's nuclear arsenal.

A study entitled "Chinese Nuclear Forces and US Nuclear War Planning" published in November by the Federation of American Scientists and Natural Resources Defense Council found that the Pentagon and the CIA have proudly exaggerated the Chinese nuclear "threat" to justify US spending on a new generation of nuclear weapons.

Some in the United States argue that China is the next great threat and therefore new weapons and increased military spending are necessary. Some in China see recent US-led wars, military

modernizations, and aggressive strategies and policies as proof of American "hegemony" and argue that this requires them to modernise their military. Both countries are investing large sums of money in planning for war, and any US-China war comes with the potential of escalating to use of nuclear weapons," it warned.

The US stockpile of 10,000 nuclear weapons midgets that of China which is estimated at just 200. China has only 20 intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBM) capable of hitting the US, while the US has more than 830 most with multiple nuclear warheads that can reach China. The US is also far ahead of China in nuclear technology, having strategic submarines capable of launching nuclear weapons and nuclear air strike capability.

The study estimated even a limited nuclear exchange would result in huge casualties. A US nuclear strike just on China's 20 ICBM silos would kill and injure 26 million people, while the study found the US has had plans for "much larger strikes" against China in the past. A Chinese attack on continental US with all of its 20 nuclear missiles can cause an estimated 40 million casualties.

There are signs, however, that the US is endeavoring for nuclear primacy that is, the ability to prevent nuclear retaliation in response to a first strike. Such a capacity would fundamentally alter the strategic equation, which, during the Cold War, was based on the paradigm of Mutually Assured Destruction that is, a standoff in which neither side launches a first strike for fear of a devastating retaliatory attack. The Bush administration is not only refining its offensive nuclear capacity but is also developing an anti-ballistic missile system aimed at minimizing any effective retaliation.

As potential targets of a US attack, China and Russia have been compelled to develop new generations of mobile ICBM's to evade a first strike. The Bush administration has repeatedly criticised China for its "secretive" defence expansion. But its own relentless military build up, as well as its aggression in Iraq and Afghanistan, constitute the overriding destabilising factor in world politics and heighten the danger of war.

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India-Russia nuclear cooperation: A balance of interests

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The Russian President, Vladimir Putin's visit to India during its fifty-seventh Republic Day celebrations in January 2007 was his first after the signing of Indo-US nuclear deal. During the summit meeting held in New Delhi, the two nations signed nine bilateral agreements and adopted two documents on civilian nuclear cooperation, military hardware and trade expansion. Putin's visit before the implementation of the Indo-US nuclear deal has enormous significance for the deal and for Indo-Russian ties.

India and Russia have been long-standing friends with India being a traditional buyer of Soviet military hardware since the 1950s. India and Russia have also agreed to enhance civilian nuclear energy cooperation for strengthening India's energy security. The two democracies signed a "memorandum of intent" to add four 1000 MW nuclear reactors to the power plant under construction at Koodankulam, Tamil Nadu and to build more nuclear reactors at new sites under International Atomic Energy Agency safeguards.

Moscow's commitment to provide uninterrupted supply of low enriched uranium for the Koodankulam nuclear power unit and the additional light water reactors in the Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant indicates that Russia wants to step up nuclear cooperation with India.

Putin's offer of civilian nuclear power cooperation will bring Russia back into India's strategic calculations. The Russian president in one quick stroke has restored the balance in their relations with his mutually beneficial offer. India's commitment to deepening civilian nuclear energy cooperation with Russia will dispel fears in Moscow that New Delhi's growing proximity with Washington will overshadow Indo-Russian ties.

Russia is a key member of the Nuclear Suppliers' Group and therefore, President Putin's visit to India before the finalization of the 123 Agreement is enormously important. Russia has committed to further the Indo-US nuclear deal for ensuring fuel supplies. This will undoubtedly strengthen India's case to the NSG that it relaxes its non-proliferation guidelines in view of India's unblemished non-proliferation record. With Russia's backing, India can hope to secure the best bargain once it enters into the final round of negotiations on the Indo-US nuclear deal with the US and the IAEA. Putin's offer will provide a strong incentive for the US to hasten

the implementation of the deal so that Washington is not deprived of the political advantage with India vis-à-vis Moscow.

Russia's initiative endorses India's nuclear weapons status. In the joint statement, which is identical to the Indo-US joint statement of 18 July 2005, President Putin described India as a state "possessing advanced nuclear technologies." However, a significant point of difference is that the Indo-Russian agreement will facilitate the reprocessing of nuclear fuel by India for atomic power plants built with Russian assistance. India will not have any constraints to proceed with a 'closed fuel cycle'. Russia is willing to accept India's desires to reprocess spent fuel and maintain fuel reserves within the country. This is in sharp contrast to the Hyde Act that regulates reprocessing of spent fuel to conditions "commensurate with reactor operating requirements."

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Putin's visit also indicates that the Indo-US nuclear deal is not just a bilateral issue. The final implementation of the Hyde Act will free India from the shackles of the three-decade long technology denial regimes and pave the way for India to embark upon nuclear energy cooperation with other nuclear energy suppliers like France. This will also open vast investment opportunities for them. Putin is aware of the prospective US\$100 billion nuclear power plants investments likely to be made by India.

The world today is characterized by both cooperation and competition. While it is important to cooperate with the US for nuclear energy assistance, competition between the US and other "major balancers" will also be highly advantageous for India. Hence, India and Russia must seize the opportunity to promote a strong partnership and enhance the peaceful use of nuclear energy.

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