

# Russia resets policy for Middle East

DR. ABDUL RUFF COLACHAL

THE terrifying US agenda of "regime change and democracy" for New Middle East is the natural fallout of its desire to control the energy resources of the region. Ever since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the emergence of the United States as the world's sole superpower, wars, violence, and mass killings have thus proliferated to the extent that the world is now suffering from a condition of near anarchy, and nowhere more so than in the Greater Middle East. Much of the problem can be traced to America's unilateralism under the Presidency of George W. Bush. It means that over the past six years the United States has been able to do what it pleases without restraint - to invade, torture, kill and destroy, ignoring international laws and conventions. With the collapse of US led wars in Middle East, spoiling the US image as a great super power eager to lead the world on democratic and enlightened path, Russia further seeks to reassert its influence in the region with positive gestures toward West Asia as well as slamming of US aggressive foreign policy that is increasingly endangering the world.

The Arabs, like other Muslims, are profoundly worried by the way the United States has lost its mind after 9/11, embarking on a worldwide campaign against enemies, real and imaginary. Putin's Middle East tour of Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Jordan in February, making the historic first ever visit to Saudi Arabia by a Russian head of state, attests Moscow's proactive intent for the region.

Even as the USA, that has maintained the "identical views" with Israel over world issues, particularly the Middle East crises, is intolerably troubled in Gulf waters, Russia has come out to soothe the wounded pride of the Arabs caused by the war strategies of the US-led forces. President Putin reiterated his proposal made during his first ever visit to Israel and Egypt in 2005 to hold an international conference on the Middle East peace process in Moscow later this year and the members of the Middle East "quarter" - the USA, the UN and the EU as well as "all the states concerned" would be invited to attend the conference.

Putin made a historical, confrontational speech in the presence of,

among others, US Defense Secretary Robert Gates, against American foreign policy at a prestigious European security conference in Munich, accusing Washington of unilateralism. Putin states that the Bush administration has undermined the UN, made a dangerous mess in the Gulf, and threatens to ignite a strategic arms race by modernizing the US nuclear arsenal and planning to deploy ballistic missile defense systems (BMD) in Poland and the Czech Republic. Moscow resented the NATO expansion to include East European nations, excluding Russia, which sees itself primarily as European rather than Asian nation.

Russia does not have direct borders with West Asia, but buffer zones created by the former Soviet republics and sea-lake waters connect them. Kremlin's resolve to regain its "legitimate" control over the former Soviet republics, barring a couple of Central Asian states and Belarus, has not materialized as yet. On the contrary, some of them like Georgia and Ukraine have drifted to the Western side. Moscow's efforts to control them all using energy diplomacy have not favored Kremlin significantly. Moscow forecasts that once relations with Middle East are strengthened, the Central Asia and other regions around Russia would become friendly and non-threatening, if not beneficial, to Moscow.

The Russian President is determined to transform Russia's Cold War image as a regional instigator and arms proliferator into one of a peacemaker and stabilizer. Focused on balanced relations across the globe, Russian diplomacy moves ahead to consolidate its role in the Middle East, too. The Kremlin sees the Middle East as the most disturbed region of the globe today and the USA is the cause of it. Moscow's advantage in West Asia is Russia's century long ties with Muslim nations in Middle East and Central Asia, the latter being a part of the USSR until 1991 when the mighty nation collapsed and disintegrated.

Putin, who took Russia from its chaotic existence in 1990 to new heights in economic, political and military terms by 2004 with politico-economic ties extended to both West and East, now wants feelings of animosity extinguished and past threats forgotten. The BBC's Russian affairs analyst Steven Eke

says that Mr. Putin's tour of these pro-western Middle Eastern nations comes at a time when Moscow's disillusionment with the West is growing. Mr. Putin has thus stepped right on to American turf and challenged the position the USA enjoyed as the chief power broker in West Asia since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.

## Economic Prospects

The economic agreements with Saudi Arabia and Qatar occupied priority space in Kremlin's diplomacy. Putin's visit has made Moscow's political as well as economic intent for the Middle East amply clear. Putin promised that Russia would help Saudi Arabia in developing a national nuclear program as well as launching several Saudi satellites in addition to the seven already boosted into orbit by a Russian missile in 2005. His visit to Saudi Kingdom assumes a lot of significance for emerging East-West relations. In Qatar, the third gas giant of the world after Russia and Iran, the proposal for OPEC for Gas regime, or Gas Cartel, was generally addressed. Saudi Arabia and Russia are the world's top most oil producers. Lending credence to its claim as a global champion of energy security today, Russia extracted 9.236 million barrels per day of oil in June 2006. 46,000 barrels more than Saudi Arabia and its oil supply is expected to average 9.9 mbpd in 2007. As a result, Riyadh wants its own "energy dialogue" with Moscow, which has been facilitated in some way through the five-year oil-and-gas cooperation agreement signed during the landmark visit of Crown Prince Abdullah in 2003.

Russia and Qatar discussed establishing a mechanism to coordinate the supply of natural gas across the globe. In Qatar he held talks with Khalifa Al Thani, who also backed the proposal of Middle East Conference. Moscow and Doha are also engaged in intensifying bilateral energy cooperation, with Gazprom expressing interest in joint gas production and refining projects in Qatar. (Europe imports nearly 44 per cent of its gas supplies from Russia, and the European Union leaders have said they would oppose Russian moves towards forming a cartel).

Though Russia is the world's third largest weapons exporter after the United States and Great Britain,



at \$7.1 billion, Russia sold more weapons than the US in 2005. As Russia is diversifying its arms clients beyond China and India after losing out on the Syrian, Iraqi and Libyan markets the Gulf countries too are looking for a basket of suppliers beyond the United States. Moscow justifies its resolve without confronting the West.

## Middle East Conflicts

Discussions surrounding regional stabilization plans also touch upon anti-terror cooperation in the face of common threats and challenges, but in a lighter vein. Jordan has more political significance for Moscow, than economic. By involving itself with the Iranian nuclear issue as a "honest broker", Russia also attempts to help the scenario in Iraq, where Iran's influence in the internal politics of the war-torn country destroyed by the US-led forces is increasing every day, posing a threat to the unity of the country and throwing up the possibility of the conflict

spilling over to the neighboring countries. Apart from economic interests, it is in this context that Putin is visiting Jordan. Earlier, as part of his West Asian tour in April 2005, Mr. Putin had paid the first ever visit by a Russian or Soviet leader to Israel and Palestine and the first such visit to Egypt after 1965. Proactive role of Egypt and Syria is vital in resolving the Middle East Conflict, involving Palestine, Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran and Lebanon. Egypt and Russia enjoyed close ties until the 1970s when Egypt turned to the US, which has since become its most strategic foreign partner. His policy is aimed at bolstering Russia's political and economic relations with Egypt. Israel's intermittent wars with the Palestinians and Lebanese have been a serious irritant in resolving the crises because the USA and UK support Israel and there is a growing lobby the world over for Israel and against the Arabs. Syria wants to redeem its territories on Golan Heights it lost, when Israel with US

support annexed them. Moscow has maintained strong economic ties with Syria.

US-led wars in the Gulf have complicated the Palestinian issue further. Russia strongly opposes the Israeli invasions of Lebanon and Palestine, though Kremlin strives to keep the Israelis in good humors. Most important, Russia's main concerns remain to revolve around the escalation between the US and Iran, not because it expects US military action, but because tension would lead to the deployment of advanced US missile systems near Russian borders, which Moscow perceives as a threat to Russian security.

Palestine, Afghanistan, Iraq and Iran figured prominently in the talks held by the Russian leader with Arab leaders. While Afghanistan is being looted and destroyed as part of the establishing a so-called democratic world and the Afghans being massacred and tortured by the NATO forces, supported by several countries including Israel and India even with their resources, the US-Israel combine is fully focused on eliminating countries like Palestine, Lebanon and Iran. Justifiably worried for their own security, Iran and its local friends - Syria, Lebanon and Palestine - have been attempting to challenge and contain American and Israeli power. If you hit us, they say, we will hit you back. This is legitimate and they have achieved some vague success. They need to recognize that the Western world, too, has its interests - in the free flow of oil, for example, and in using phrases like regime change, democracy and pluralistic system.

A balance of power means respect for everyone's interests, not only of Israel or USA. But the USA and Israel are only concerned about their security, and they also cause insecurity for the rest of the world. The problem with US is that it is keen that no one country in the West Asia, other than Israel, should possess nuclear weapons. When the story about Iraq possessing WMD has been exposed badly, Iran is accused of threatening the world with its new nuclear program. They insist that there is a danger to the Middle East and world at large until Iran comes clean about its real intentions, all those supplying it with arms and extending nuclear cooperation must cease to do so. Going any further at this stage

would only strengthen Iran's ambitions to dominate the Middle East even more.

## Looking Forward

Clearly, a permanent resolution of Middle East crises requires the proactive role of USA, UK, Russia, Egypt, EU, apart from the UN and the parties concerned. There have been intense diplomatic efforts between the US and Russia in the recent past on Iran, particularly after the increased US naval presence in the region heightened tension. While the Gulf countries undoubtedly resist Iran's nuclear foray, they also fear that any US military misadventure would wreak further havoc in the region. In this context, just as Russia can use its influence with Iran to insist on peaceful nuclear program, it can also use its influence in the UNSC to block any unwarranted action. Both sides must insist on "sensible" policies from the US and Iran.

Engagement of both Arabs and Israel by USA and Russia is the only way to achieve a qualitative shift in the Middle East peace process, which Russia strives to achieve, despite Putin's aggressive rhetoric. The "Gulf ball" thus is in the court of both Moscow and Washington, confusing the world even more. Cold war would escalate the regional tension further. Presumably, the rhetoric was meant to reiterate the Kremlin desire to forge strong relations with West Asian nations against the wishes of the US.

Putin's tour of Saudi Arabia and Qatar and Jordan, is the first of its kind in the history of diplomatic links between Russia and the Gulf region. "We are in a new level with the view to broaden political talks with Qatar, Kuwait and Bahrain and strengthen economic-commercial cooperation with Saudi Arabia," Russian Security Council Secretary Igor Ivan said in January. Russia certainly can play a credible role in the Middle East peace process. Putin now wants feelings of animosity extinguished and past threats to be forgotten. It depends on whether the USA is genuinely seeking a constructive role in the region; for just as the US administration should rid itself of the 'Cold War victory' complex. Reluctance to come to terms with reality in the region would, eventually, lead USA to dustbin of history, leaving Russia, Japan and China in

the center of international politics. Some Middle East countries like Iran and Syria will no doubt be immensely reassured by Putin's diplomacy, but so will Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states who are eagerly seeking to diversify their international relations so as to reduce their dependence on a dangerously volatile United States.

Russia is becoming a fairly important player in global politics whose influence stems largely from its permanent veto seat in the UN Security Council and its consequent ability to affect regional developments in the Persian Gulf. As one of the four sponsors of the peace "roadmap" comprising the EU, the UN, the US and Russia, Russia's influence in Arab affairs assumes significance as much as Putin's visit to West Asia is viewed as a peace road to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The Kremlin is currently formulating a new Middle East policy, but the absence of a profound, coherent Russian Middle East policy, however, gives rise to confusion about Moscow's long-term goals in the region.

Perhaps, if Russia is able to assert the power of Kremlin to challenge US unilateralism, it will continue to be a more responsible player in the Middle East, acting with a greater sense of strategic vision. US lack the guts to attack Moscow, and much of Europe might rally behind it. Putin's conclusion was the following: "I am convinced that we have reached that decisive moment when we must seriously think about the architecture of global security. We must proceed by searching for a reasonable balance between the interests of all participants in the international dialogue." And although Russia's influence is also translated into the ability to sell weapons, Moscow is unlikely to return to the Middle East as a strategic competitor or a deliberate and aggressive country that proliferates conventional or weapons of mass destruction (WMD) technology. Putin has taken into confidence the regional leaders of Moscow's constructive role. The US is deeply worried about the outcomes of Putin's West Asian tour and working overnight to set its policy right in the Gulf region.

The author is a research scholar, School of International Studies, JNU, New Delhi.

# Anti-corruption efforts - some suggestions

LT. COL. A.Y. ZOBAYERULLAH, psc (Retd)

REVOLUTION may produce a picture of a sudden eruption but its plan and preparation is always a protracted one. Revolution cannot be triggered by asking people to join in, rather it demands a deliberate planning up to minute details and execution through media manipulation followed by sporadic but planned physical action. Similarly, anti-corruption revolution cannot be conducted by asking people to join in; it has to be planned and executed by professionals starting from psychological warfare, media or motivational experts down to the employment of the law enforcing agencies.

If our ACC really means to conduct a successful anti-graft revolution, it has to repeat the history of revolution, which brought dynamic changes in the field where they were launched. Bolshevik revolution, Renaissance or European industrial revolution, all had similar circumstances. In the IT era, the technological revolution that the world is experiencing today, we can plainly see how much effort the researchers and experts are putting in behind the scene. As such, we also need to have an open-minded team within our ACC with a missionary zeal, but who are dynamically creative in thinking at platform level.

It is clear that the task bestowed upon the chairman of ACC requires some different traits other than what a successful military commander requires having. The ACC must select a professional team through headhunt basis who will plan a protracted psychological operation to change our corrupt environment to an honest one.

Coercive and muscle-based decision or actions can only terrorize the corrupt people but can never turn them honest. It is difficult to make people believe how effective a planned psychological operation can be in whipping up public opinion and successfully bringing about a change in the social environment. This is the aspect that is sadly lacking in the Commission's efforts so far; the nation cannot expect a second chance in the foreseeable future that has been offered this time by Nature.

If we broadly divide the overall anti-corruption effort into three distinctive measures they can be termed as active measure, passive measure and the last, system development. So far, maximum emphasis is on active measure; some bit of system development is also apparent but there is minimum implementation of passive measure - the measure, which is essentially responsi-

ble for environmental change. Some passive measures were seen operative but those are notional compared to modern day psychological warfare campaign standards.

To design an effective and long lasting passive counter measure against the corrupt psyche, we need

Usually an individual who indulges in corruption is a corrupt person, whereas, if we try to analyze the characteristics of a corrupt person, we have to take into consideration the moral value or ethical standing of that individual. That way it is only the moral value, which can be considered as a unit of

the corrupt member of LEA and a hijacker. At this point the member of LEA is more detrimental to the nation because the hijacker is an identified culprit whereas the member of LEA is not. Here, LEA does not mean a particular department, rather the government machinery as a whole.

a) A corrupt man may have some ethics of his own, which is mostly to rationalize his own conscience. This type of men probably forms the biggest group of corrupt people. The philosophies with which such type of people indulges in corruption vary from one another. However, a few of them may be mentioned here.

1) For sheer survival someone has to indulge in a bit of corruption in a third world country like Bangladesh.

2) Such a corrupt person is often heard saying, "There is no social security in our country like other developed countries. If I die today, my whole family will be on the road tomorrow. So, I must have a house of my own and sufficient (?) bank balance for the future of my family".

3) To substantiate their wrong deeds it is erroneously argued by a group of corrupt people that the act of corruption is always done by human beings and the word corruption is also coined by human beings. The Bible or the Holy Quran did not say anything specific about the type of corruption we see these days. So somehow the word corruption is (kind of) a misnomer to a lot of corrupt people.

4) Some people try to convince their conscience by arguing, "My amount of corruption is so negligible compared to the total volume of corruption in Bangladesh that it does not really matter whether I stop or continue."

5) "If some one wants to be rich, one has to be corrupt. In this world there is no rich man who is not corrupt. To be rich is not an unethical aim where corruption is a secondary issue". How strangely fallacious logic!

6) As the act of corruption is rampant in our country and there is hardly any chance of legal action against it, so why lag behind and suffer from frustration?

7) Some one convinces his conscience by saying that he does not apply force to take money from the people. Being a government representative and holding a decision-making chair, he only shares the profit between him and the contractors. Any contractor coming to his terms gets the business. He does not force some one to take the business.

c) A very small group of corrupt people is also there who after discharging their responsibilities as govern-

ment representative do not mind receiving gratification in the form of money or gift. They neither force nor adopt any trick for their illegal gifts. This group of people having moderate corruption philosophy is less damaging for the nation than other groups.

d) There is yet another group of corrupt people who cannot tolerate corruption in any way, they even do not receive gifts, but fail to show any initiative, drive or sincerity. Such mentality could be an inherent standard of some one or could be an outcome of a corrupt society. Being cautious about their social or financial security, they may quite logically lose all initiative to fight corruption and in the process, working spirit. They can be termed as passive corrupt people. This type of people is equally damaging as the group we have mentioned above because this group of people work as bottleneck in most of the development activities.

Once these gamuts are identified in clear terms, the job of ACC becomes easier. It has to design a psychological or media operation to turn those wrong philosophies right. People have to be convinced that wrong is wrong and that a wrong can never be made right by self-deceiving rationalization. Conviction of corrupt people must be turned towards true honesty. In fact this is the test of efficiency of any ACC. Arresting corrupt people, investigation and framing charge-sheet should form only one part of the total ACC effort.

Coercive or active anti-corruption effort only produces transitory or compulsive honesty but this time we want people to be honest by intention, not by compulsion. Besides the active measure and system development, if ACC can achieve the desired honest environment we would need very less time to bridge the gap between a developed nation and ours.

Now the question is what are these passive measures? How can they be organized, launched or disseminated to ensure optimum affect in mass psyche?

The answer is trouble-free; pick up the right people for the job, create a team of psychological warfare campaign planners and media visionaries. Their mission would be to ensure an honest environment wherein corrupt people of today will feel guilty of their acts and refrain from such deeds even when they are not under strict supervision. Give the team a free hand to plan, present and finally execute a long lasting solution to our deep-rooted corrupt psyche. Indeed there is no alternative to this.

The author is a freelancer.

# China and Japan - Assessing the rapprochement

RUKMANI GUPTA

Prime Minister Wen Jiabao's recent trip to Japan, the first by a Chinese Prime Minister in seven years, was characterised by Wen as an ice-melting visit, to reciprocate Abe's China visit that was described as an 'ice-breaker.' During the visit, China and Japan reiterated their commitment to improving trade and economic relations and recognised the importance of improved bilateral relations for the entire region. Cooperation is now slated to cover a whole host of areas. Whether it translates into lasting political trust, however, remains debatable.

Wen's trip comes at a time when China is preparing for the 17th CCP Congress in the autumn of this year. President Hu Jintao's ability to ensure domestic stability and cordial relations with important neighbours will go a long way towards strengthening his position within the CCP. A reshuffle of important official posts can be expected during the Congress and China cannot afford to waste its energies on diplomatic discord with Japan over issues of history that could threaten the domestic situation as the anti-Japanese riots had done in 2005.

With the Olympics in 2008 and the Shanghai Expo in 2010, China needs Japanese technology and investment more than ever before. The dexterity with which China handles its problems with Japan will reflect on its position as a responsible player in international politics. At a time when a resolution calling for official apology from Japan on the issue of 'comfort women,' is on the anvil in the US House of Representatives, China has displayed marked restraint on the issue. Furthermore, it has agreed to help Japan resolve the abductions issue with North Korea and responded to Japan's requests to support its bid for a permanent seat in the UNSC by expressing its understanding of Japan's desire to play a more important role in international affairs.

Wen's visit also frames the Chinese policy of seeking to allay Japanese fears about China's economic rise and military programme. Japanese Foreign Minister Tarō Asō has been vocal in his criticism of increased Chinese defence spending. During Wen's visit, comments on China's military modernization were conspicuously absent. The move to establish a military hotline, the inclusion of Japan in policies for safe energy transportation and an understanding of Japan's desire to play a larger role on the global scene seem part of Chinese attempts to placate those viewing China as a military threat. Wen's emphasis on greater economic engagement between the two states and China's need to learn from Japan in areas like management and technological innovation seem directed at those who see China's economic growth as leading to a displacement of Japan in the global economy. By including issues related to energy and the environment, China seems to be at pains to discover synergies, while convincing Japan that Chinese economic growth is inclusive and predicated on the economic growth of its neighbours.

For Abe, the description of Wen's visit as a 'success' by the Chinese media is a vindication of his policy to prioritise Japan's relations with its immediate neighbours. While Koizumi was held responsible for the hiatus in bilateral relations, Abe is being credited with creating an atmosphere conducive to improving ties. Following Wen's visit, Japanese businessmen have been reassured about the safety of their investments in China. At the same time, Abe has assuaged the fears of the nationalists in Japan by refusing to comment on whether or not he will visit the Yasukuni Shrine. Abe has also paved the way for nationalist education in primary schools and is pushing for constitutional reforms to enable Japan's becoming a 'normal' country. His ability to balance the reform agenda and the desire to improve relations with China is commendable. Japan's neighbours in East Asia who have suffered Japanese aggression have taken their cue on the Japanese reform process from China, which has been muted in its criticism. So long as Abe is able to strengthen economic engagement with China, he will also be able to fend off criticism on domestic policies.

The fact remains, however, that Japan has intensified its military collaboration with the United States to facilitate greater interoperability of forces. Not only are the Patriot Advanced Capability 3 (PAC-3) interceptor missiles deployed in Okinawa and Truma, Japan intends to install 30 PAC-3 launchers in ten sites and four SM-3 missile ships by March 2011. These deployments do not require a change in Japanese laws. Recently, Japan's House of Councillors passed the basic law for guarding its maritime interests, which envisages 12 measures including: protection of maritime resources; development of EEZs and protection of remote islands. It is on these three counts that Japan has disputes with China in the East China Sea. The basic maritime law is expected to help transform Japan from an 'island country' into a 'maritime power.' With the progress of Chinese naval modernization however, there could be a potential for future conflict.

By arrangement with IPCS, New Delhi.