

Procession of portraits

MOAZZEM HOSSAIN

It appears that the nation's politics will enter a new phase soon. The CEC has just released the roadmap for conducting the general election at the end of 2008. On the same day, Sheikh Hasina was taken into custody on an alleged extortion case.

This could be an attempt on the part of the CTG to implement the so-called "minus two" agenda, which is almost universally talked about in contemporary politics. The armed forces, however, through the office of its chief of staff General M U Ahmed, have been repeatedly saying that the military whole-heartedly wants democracy to thrive in this nation.

In view of the above, the nation has certainly been thrown into confusion with the events surrounding Sheikh Hasina's arrest. If this event can be seen as the beginning of implementing the "minus two" agenda, it will not only remove the two leaders from participating in the next election, as a consequence, it will also break up the AL and the BNP.

If this happens, the present uncertainty in politics may even deepen. Unfortunately, because of the way that politicians had behaved over the last 15 years to fulfil their own interests rather than the nation's, a full scale unrest cannot be ruled out in the near future.

For example, it is now abundantly clear that most of the MPs and ministers, together with their

cadres and cronies, had taken the nation to the top of the corruption ladder of the world, not once, but six times in a row. The integrity of the politicians of both persuasions will be seen if the top positions fallen vacant soon.

Having said that, some commentators have been expressing doubts about the recent reform proposals put forward by all the major parties and some individuals. The doubts are not about the proposals, but about the ability of the politicians to implement the reform measures after the lifting of the current ban on politics.

Many even suggest that the whole process of reform would fall apart when presented to the party forums (councils). Sensing the ultimate outcome of the reform proposals of mainstream

parties in the future, together with the possible removal of two leaders from the ground, an old breed of politicians with new colours has emerged. Among them, two are certainly very interesting: Dr. Ferdous Ahmed Qureshi and Professor Sirajul Alam Khan.

Both of them come from greater Noakhali area, and were Chhatra League leaders in late 50s and early 60s and were very close to Bangabandhu, the father of the nation. Since the formation of Dr. Qureshi's new party is progressing very fast, the rest of this commentary will make some observations on his initiatives.

Dr. Qureshi was a dormant character in politics in the last 25 years, although he was once a front ranking BNP leader under

general Zia. He was also close to general M A G Osmani immediately after the assassination of Zia.

It was not clear, however, what role he played during the regimes of general Ershad, Khaleda Zia, Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Nizami. It is however clear that he has found a new opportunity in the present environment, when both the major parties (AL and BNP) are in disarray.

Dr. Qureshi expects to launch his party in the later part of 2007, and would be contesting all 300 seats in the parliament. He has, however, brought back the issue of past supreme leaders of this nation to the top of his agenda.

His party office at Shegun Bagicha displays a procession of portraits of six late leaders: Sher

e Bangla Fazlul Huq, Huseyn Shahid Suhrawardy, Moulana Bhashani, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Ziaur Rahman and M A G Osmani. In his last press conference, Dr. Qureshi made it clear that if he forms the next government the portraits of all the six leaders will be displayed on the walls of government offices.

As far as the issue of father of the nation is concerned, Dr. Qureshi's party immediately enters into a clash with the AL. Display of portrait or not, the nation had settled this issue a long time ago. One does not have to repeat it here. Ask anyone on the street, there will be no problem in finding the answer.

While Dr. Qureshi finds it acceptable that Bangabandhu

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman is the hazar bochorer sreshta Bangalee, Mujib as father of the nation is unacceptable to him.

This whole affair appears to me to be conflicting and confusing, if not contradictory. Why? Even before the birth of a new party, the leader braces himself for a debate which, in fact, had been settled at the time of the birth of this nation. There is no reason at this stage, when the nation is going through an unprecedented crisis, to bring this issue back on the table.

No one knows where we are heading, or what kind of government we will have after 2008. The politicians in the past had played many unethical games by using the names of our late supreme leaders. The time has certainly

come now to leave them in peace, and let the nation mourn for those who had experienced brutal, unnatural deaths. Bring back ethics and moral in politics, which all of our six leaders so ardently fought for.

It would be a matter of great disrespect and dishonesty, if Dr. Qureshi, after forming the government in 2008 (?), displays a procession of portraits in all the government offices. Certainly, our leaders deserve better. The nation does not need any more abuse towards our dead leaders. Follow them and learn to stand one's own feet.

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New diplomacy: Challenges for foreign policy

DAVID MILIBAND

HIS is an exciting and important time in British politics. After ten years in government, the Labour Party is seeking under new leadership to set out and deliver a renewed vision for the future of the country that builds on the social, economic, and political changes introduced since 1997.

The battle of ideas over the next couple of years will, in my view, determine the direction of our country over the next twenty. So the stakes are high: will progressive forces establish a new centre of gravity in politics, or will the 20th Century pattern of conservative dominance interrupted by bursts of radicalism become the norm again?

Today, I want to address the relevance of foreign policy to the drive to build a better Britain, the priorities for foreign engagement, and the powers available to us to advance our goals. In that context it is right but also symbolic that I give my first speech as foreign secretary with organisations that symbolise the old and new strengths we will need in foreign policy: the insight, knowledge and expertise of Chatham House and the capacity for engagement with people on a global scale demonstrated by Avaaz.

Every foreign secretary quotes Lord Palmerston, who famously said: "we have no permanent allies and no permanent enemies, only permanent interests." But is it true? Today, we have permanent alliances. The US is the single most important bilateral relationship. We are committed members of the EU.

We are proud of our role in the UN, on the Security Council, and the Commonwealth. These alliances are founded on shared values and embedded in shared institutions. The evolution in foreign policy is driven by changing circumstances and the changing distribution of power, not by changes in values and alliances. This evolution depends on new thinking and new solutions.

My argument today is this

Britain should respond to the real insecurities and opportunities that exist in the world, not by retreating from international engagement but by using our strengths so that we are a force for good for Britain by being a force for good in the world. The old distinction, between foreign policy that affected foreigners and domestic policy that affected our citizens, has collapsed. So foreign policy is about values and interests together.

Britain brings to this task real strengths. A new prime minister with a clear view of how the national interest is best served by international engagement. An economy that is increasingly the banker to the world. Culture

that is globally admired. Ditto military forces. And alliances that stretch North, East, South and West.

But foreign policy goals and methods must adapt to a series of shifts in the distribution of power: a world where the security threat is not just from excessive state power, but increasingly from terrorism and conflict within failed states; a world where economic prosperity depends on new bargains between industrialised and developing countries; a world where social change is fostered not just through government-to-government relationships but between businesses, NGOs, and faith groups.

In this new context, we need to think how we can deploy Britain's assets -- both the soft power of ideas and influence, and the harder power of our economic and military incentives and interventions -- to promote the international security and prosperity on which we all depend.

This thinking on a new diplomacy can begin in the Foreign Office, but it needs to draw on the widest base of ideas. I want to end tonight by setting out the questions I am asking of the FCO and want us to work on together -- in the seminar rooms of Chatham House and among the million members of Avaaz.

A better Britain

I am a departmental minister but also a member of the government. So it is important that I start from the overall aims of the government, and then explain how I think foreign policy can play a role in delivering them. The new government's project is focused on three core elements, each of which requires an active foreign policy.

First, our prosperity relies on a more open Britain -- open to new investment and trade, to new people and ideas. In the 21st century, the successful countries of the world will be those that are more open in their social structures, more open in their political structures, more open, above all, to the talent of individual citizens, whatever their background.

Second, our security relies on tackling instability and injustice at home and abroad. It requires cooperation with countries on terrorism, migration and organised crime. It requires collective action on the great existential threats, from nuclear proliferation to climate change.

Third, our mission to give power to people to shape their lives depends not just on local accountability but also on global institutions, global agreements and global links.

The vision is a Britain that is a global hub. Just as the City of London acts as the centre of the global financial market, British cities and institutions and ideas can become the hubs for scientific, cultural and political collaboration. But the vision needs to

be delivered in new circumstances with new tools.

The changing distribution of power

The environment for diplomacy has been affected by a series of shifts in the distribution of power at international level. "Balance of power" is no longer a basis for diplomacy. Today, the new diplomacy needs to reflect the new distribution of power.

First, for much of the last century our security concerns were primarily about excessive and expansionist state power, threatening their own citizens or neighbouring countries. Today, some of the greatest threats are likely to emerge in countries where state power is too weak, not too strong -- too weak to clamp down on the creeping threat of global terrorism.

The implication is clear: building the capacity of states must go hand in hand with building democratic accountability. While we have actually seen a substantial reduction in the size of conventional and nuclear arsenals since the end of the cold war, the sense of insecurity felt by our citizens may actually have increased. Across the world, people are demanding more power for themselves. Our task is to make this a force for progress not destruction.

Second, over the next two decades, with the growing strength of China and India, we are likely to see political, economic and military power more geographically dispersed than it has been since the rise to global dominance of the European Empires in the 19th Century. This makes our most important bilateral relationship -- with the United States -- more, not less, important.

It makes the case for our leading role within the European Union and Nato more obvious than ever. It makes our membership of the Security Council and, therefore, our work with Russia and China more vital than ever. It makes our determination to champion UN reform -- with Security Council membership for a larger group of countries -- more relevant than ever. And it actually offers a new basis for a vibrant Commonwealth as a unique network of nations.

Third, there is a mismatch between national power and global problems. The risk of financial crises, climate change, and health pandemics, cannot be mitigated by individual countries; they require collective action on a global scale.

Managing the risks from globalisation and maximising the benefits requires institutional innovation, and the development of the EU reflects this.

Fourth, the power to coordinate at scale can be done without the hierarchies of bureaucracies or the price mechanism of markets -- either the helping hand of the state or the invisible hand of the market. Technology

is enabling networks to challenge the power of traditional incumbents, economically and politically.

In benign forms, it can be seen with Linux challenging Microsoft Windows, Wikipedia challenging Encyclopaedia Britannica, or political campaigns such as "Make Poverty History", "Stop Climate Chaos", or "Move On". Less welcome, obviously, is the increasing capacity of extremists and terrorists to coordinate their disparate activities without the vulnerability of a single point of control. The power of technology to connect people across the world needs to be put to strategic use.

The new distribution of power changes the way we need to analyse threats and exploit opportunities. Our security is threatened by terrorist networks using the freedom of an open society, but can be enhanced by the spread of democracy and good governance. Our prosperity is threatened by climate change but can be enhanced by free trade. Our sense of powerlessness is exacerbated by the weakness of international institutions, but can be diminished by the potential of new networks. In other words, there are new sources of insecurity, but also new resources for prosperity.

Soft and hard power
This has implications not just for foreign policy priorities, but also on how we go about pursuing them. If we are to continue to be a force for good, we need to be smart about how and when we combine the soft power of ideas and influence and the hard power of economic and military incentives and interventions.

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We need to be clear about values. For example, the declaration at the World Summit in 2005 that the international community has a "responsibility to protect" populations from genocide, ethnic cleansing, war crimes and crimes against humanity, marks a vital new stage in the debate about the relationship between human rights and national sovereignty.

So we are right, in my view, to work urgently to avoid a repeat of the 1990s catastrophe in the Balkans, by backing the Ahisa Plan for Kosovo strongly. These include reaffirming Iran's right to nuclear energy for peaceful purposes without discrimination and in conformity with Articles I and II of the NPT, improving Iran's access to the international economy, markets,

and capital and support for a new conference to promote dialogue and cooperation on regional security issues.

Fourth, there will be cases where direct intervention will be right. This can take a range of forms: aid convoys, police training of security forces, or deploying peacekeepers. In some areas, however, military intervention will be necessary. It was right in Kosovo in 1999 to deal with the terrible ethnic cleansing going on there.

All multilateral institutions need a strong sense of purpose. The EU was founded to tackle a threat that no longer exists: conflict within Western Europe. If it is to renew its mandate, it needs to find a new *raison d'être*, including, I believe, a focus on addressing one of the greatest threats to our future prosperity and security: climate change. Creating an Environmental Union is as big a challenge in the 21st century, as peace in Europe was in the 1950s.

We need to find similar ways of leading thought on other areas, whether this is concrete and immediate challenges such as nuclear disarmament and proliferation, or longer term challenges such as the future of global institutions.

The second source of power is influence within institutions. Britain acting alone does not possess the power or legitimacy to directly effect change on the scale required. Acting with others, we can make a difference. Multilateral action is not a soft option. Just look at Afghanistan -- a country that symbolises our dual goal of protecting our national security and promoting human rights. Our forces are deployed as part of a Nato operation involving over 30 countries, backed by a UN mandate. The military operation is backed by a comprehensive approach including EU and UN investment in development and humanitarian assistance.

The benefits of free trade or military protection when linked to states playing by the rules can incentivise reform and establish norms of behaviour. For example, I am a strong supporter of Turkish accession talks with the EU. The prospect of EU membership has built a bridge to a key Muslim country. But it has also, in recent years, helped contribute to the abolition of the death penalty and improved the rights of women and minorities.

A balanced package of incentives and sanctions are also required to apply pressure. Iran has every right to be a secure, rich country. But it doesn't have a right to undermine the stability of its neighbours. That is why we are taking a dual track approach.

We are continuing to discuss further sanctions with the group of nations that comprise the E3+3, an international coalition brought together to address concerns about Iran's nuclear program. In parallel, through the E3+3 process, we are offering a comprehensive package of incentives.

Given the levers I have just described, where should the UK concentrate its global effort: where are we most needed, and where can we most effect change? The FCO currently has ten "strategic priorities." All are

important. But can any organisation really have ten priorities? There are important public services that support British nationals and British business overseas, from our consular and visa services to UKTI. But policy priorities need rigour and clarity.

My starter for 10 is that in the coming months, we must focus on helping to tackle the causes and consequences of extremism, radicalisation and conflict; we must shape a sustainable global response to the challenge of climate change and the need for low-carbon economic development; and we must build a more effective EU to help build prosperity and security within European borders and beyond. But I want your views.

Second, cooperation across UK government. The Foreign Office is a unique global asset. But diplomacy has to be allied to other assets across government, in particular, aid, trade, investment and military intervention. How can we improve coordination across the FCO and other departments on particular countries and challenges?

Third, how can we engage beyond Whitehall, with faith groups, NGOs, business and universities? The old diplomacy was defined by a world of limited information. It was a veritable secret garden of negotiations. And secret negotiation still matters.

But we live in a world where the views of a Pashtun farmer, and the conflict he faces between illegal opium production and legal farming, holds the fate of a critical country in the balance. So the new diplomacy is public as well as private, mass as well as elite, real-time as well as deliberative. And that needs to be reflected in the way we do our business.

My predecessors in the Foreign Office, or at least that part of it which was the Colonial Office, looked out at an Empire. That is no longer the case and never will be the case. But since the decline of Empire Britain has faced a choice -- to engage with the world or retreat from it? I am clear about my answer: we must engage.

But those of us committed to engaging with the world have faced profound questions about how to do so. We confront scepticism and fatalism. John F Kennedy got this right. He said foreign policy should be based on "idealism without illusions." In this speech I have tried to speak without illusions -- about the challenges and the difficulties.

But the idealism is still there -- above all about Britain's ability to be a global hub which lives out its values and advances them abroad. The job of the Foreign Office is to lead that debate, and with your help that is what we will do.

The Rt.Hon. David Miliband MP is Foreign Secretary of the UK.