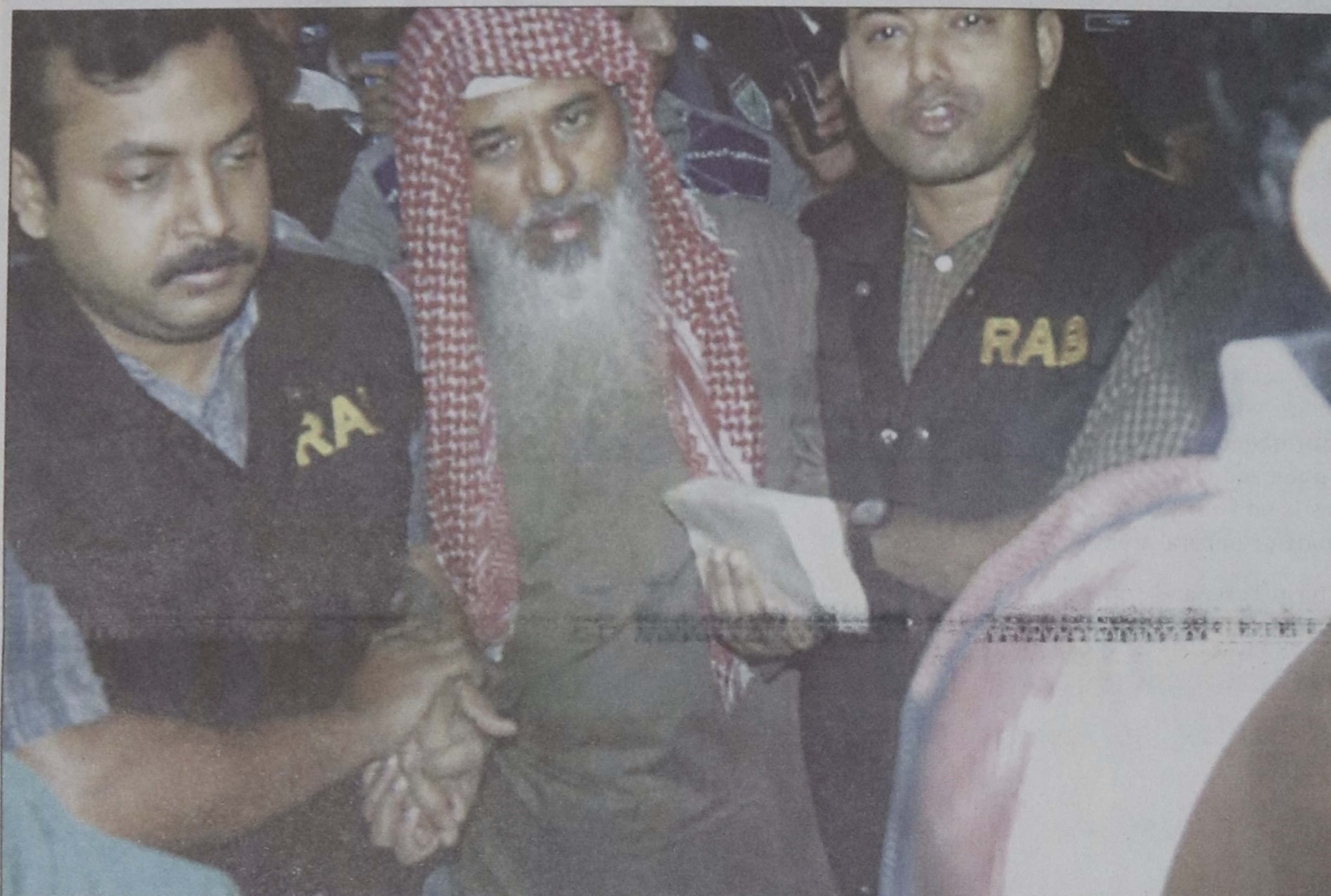


National Security Council for Bangladesh?



when Ednan Menderes replaced General Ismet Inonu through a general election, to middle of 1980s, some 61 countries had experienced military rule. Military still rules countries like Myanmar, Pakistan and Afghanistan.

In late 1970's and 1980's there were serious researches on the causes of coups de etat and consequences of military rule. A large number of talented social and political scientists including SE Finer, Samuel P. Huntington, Feit Edward, Ruth First, Robert Jackman carried out extensive and intensive research and wrote innumerable books on the causes of military intervention in the politics of developing areas. Lack of socio-economic development, presence of widespread despair and resentment among the people create opportunity for the military to intervene in politics. Personal ambition of the generals accelerates the process.

Depoliticisation of the people, stunting the process of democratic growth and stagnation of the national economy are some of the consequences of military rule. It is because of the harmful consequences of military rule that political scientists began to search out strategies for military's withdrawal or exit from politics once they had occupied it by force. It is argued that if some institutional structure like National Security Council consisting of civilian and military leaders is consti-

tuted, military leaders could have some say in the running of the state power and military officers would be less prone to take over political power directly.

In some formerly military ruled countries in Latin America military took the pledge from the political leaders that once saddled in power civilian leaders would exonerate 'wrong doing' of the officers during the military rule. In a few countries formal 'National Pacts' were signed between the military and civilian leaders to this effect. This arrangement facilitated the smooth transfer of power. Some of our military officers might desire this kind of arrangement for Bangladesh.

It is clear to any observer of Bangladesh political scene that the present ruling elite of Bangladesh includes members of caretaker government and three chiefs of armed forces of Bangladesh. Given the composition of the present ruling elite what function would be exercised by National Security Council. Obviously three chiefs of staff and key members of caretaker government would be members of the proposed NSC. As members of the present ruling elite, the three chiefs of services are already advising the caretaker government on questions of national security. I believe that with the experience of 1/11, democratically elected government will take balanced and farsighted attitude toward the issues of military participation in running of present caretaker

government. I think there will be no need of an indemnity law to keep the armed forces satisfied and obedient to civilian rulers.

It must be mentioned here that General Ershad established a National Security Council consisting of a few senior ministers of his government and three chiefs of armed forces. But Ershad had no commitment to the cause of national security. Ershad's NSC atrophied and soon died.

The concept of security is a comprehensive one. The defense of the country against direct and indirect international and national forces may be better managed by the establishment of civilian dominated NSC. But this would require the clear and thoughtful understanding of security issues by our political leaders and their commitment to NSC. The present caretaker government is constitutionally enjoined to perform the day to day functioning of the government. They are not enjoined to take major policy decisions. The caretaker government has already engulfed itself in a number of fields which they could avoid. Why should they be busy with another issue -- the establishment of National Security Council? Let us stop the talk of NSC at this moment. Let the matter be shelved for elected civilian leaders.

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A section of the civil society particularly some of the former civil and military officers have been demanding the formation of a National Security Council (NSC) for grappling with the problems of security faced by the Bangladesh government. Countries like USA, India, Pakistan and Turkey have established National Security Councils to manage their external and internal security threats. Why Bangladesh should not have a Security Council? Bangladesh has both internal and external security threat perceptions. Bangladesh faces internal security threats from fundamentalist and terrorist outfits like Jamiatul Mojahedein, Allar Dal and armed leftists. A columnist recently wrote that those who disagreed with the proposal for NSC were old fashioned in matters of security thinking.

The government of Fakhruddin Ahmed is responsive to the demand for NSC. Fakhruddin in his interview to the BBC stated: "The government is pondering over the matter as such institutions exist in neighbouring countries but no official decision has yet been arrived at."

The question of NSC is intimately connected with the general problem of civil-military relations.

Classical writers as well as leading statesmen and revolutionaries of the twentieth century have argued for civil-

ian control over the military. General Von Clausewitz, the Shakespeare of military literature wrote about 150 years ago: "The subordination of the political to the military would be unreasonable. It is policy that creates war. Policy is the intelligent faculty, war only the instrument and not the reverse."

No group of politicians better appreciates the role of violence and armed forces in state and interstate affairs than the Marxists but Marxist revolutionaries have been careful to keep tight control of the instruments of violence while determining the extent and nature of violence to be applied. Lenin was quick to note Clausewitz's dictum "war is politics continued by other means". The basic civil/military operational strategy of the Chinese revolution was encapsulated by Mao Tse-Tung in his celebrated phrase 'Politics in Command' Mao asserted: "Our principle is that the party commands the gun and the gun must never be allowed to command the party." Statesmen like Clemenceau, Lloyd George, Churchill and Kennedy have thought that war is a serious business to be left to the soldiers.

In older democracies like USA, UK, Canada, Australia, and present day India the civilian control over the military is almost total. Why do they have National Security Councils? The reason is that defence to day has become a highly specialised technical job. In formulating defence

policy the civil leaders need the advice of the military experts regarding the production of the latest strategic weapons whose use can bring about the destruction of the whole world. NSC usually consists of civilian and military leaders with civilian leaders in the majority. NSC advises the chief executive of the state on

issues of war and foreign policy. NSC in these mature democracies is completely dominated by the civilian elected leaders.

Throughout the 19th century there had been innumerable coups de etat in the Latin American countries. In the later half of twentieth century, beginning with the Turkish coup de etat of 1948



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