

National Security Council for Bangladesh-not for now



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It appears from the newspaper reports that the caretaker Government has already decided in principle to form a National Security Council (NSC) for Bangladesh. However, the details are perhaps yet to be worked out. The politicians, members of the civil society and media personalities from various shades of opinion have given out their views on the issue some in support, others in opposition. However, most people in Bangladesh have no idea what is the NSC all about. The objectives of this paper are to study the composition, role and task of the National Security Council in a number of selected countries and study its relevance to Bangladesh.

The call for forming an NSC-like organization in Bangladesh was first made by the then Army Chief Lt Gen H.M. Ershad in mid-1981 while he was maneuvering to oust Justice M.A. Sattar, elected President of the Republic. Ershad's

initial position was that the military ought to have a say in the running of the state. He argued that the military should have representation in the policy-making and implementing bodies. He did not, however, clarify how that representation would be made whether by giving the Services Chiefs supra-constitutional power as was in Turkey, or by allocating reserved seats for the military in the parliament as was practiced in some communist countries. Violating the Army Act and the military code of conduct, Ershad kept on giving statements in the local and foreign media to bring home his points. President Sattar was too weak and vacillating to rein in the General. Then, on 24 March 1982 Gen Ershad declared martial law and assumed all powers.

As Ershad took over the Presidency, he conveniently forgot the special role he had demanded for the military. There was no further talk of military's representation in the parliament or forming of a National Security Council. As long as Ershad was in power, he

ensured complete and unwavering subordination of the military to his personal whims and desire. He used the military establishment to consolidate his position. He had inducted his favourite officers in lucrative positions in ministries, corporations and divisions. This was possibly his way of having military say in the affairs of the state. In the dying days of Ershad regime in December 1990, as the whole country rose up in protest against him, the military high command had little option but to come in support of the broad masses; the generals had clearly seen the writings on the wall.

The period 1990-2006 saw three elected governments coming to power and a glint of hope on the horizon that democracy had come to stay in Bangladesh. In fact, we had already been boasting that despite our poverty, illiteracy and backwardness, democracy had taken firm roots here. In the post-9/11 world, we were shown as a model - one of the very few Muslim majority countries in the world with a functioning democracy.

Throughout the period, while the military kept itself outside the political arena, its professionalism suffered due to blatant politicization, favouritism and nepotism. Successive regimes, in order to ensure subordination of the military, manipulated and twisted the organisation to make it subservient. By 2006, the façade of democratic order had been painfully shredded and anarchy and disorder had set in the national life. The political bickering was so poisoned, the rivalry so vicious, the antagonism so profound that ordinary citizen were losing all hope for a better future. Something drastic had to be done and at that stage the military once again stepped in on 11 January 2007 in what we call our 1/11.

At this stage, I am reminded of a story narrated in his memoir by late Indian Army Chief Gen. J.N. Chowdhury (1965). Gen Chowdhury met General Ayub Khan, later President of Pakistan, in London in the early 1950s. Ayub Khan told Chowdhury, "You, in the Indian Army, could not keep the

politicians in line." Chowdhury replied, "May be we had better politicians." Indeed there is much truth in what Gen Chowdhury stated. While military in many developing countries are blamed for meddling in politics, the blame must also be shared by the politicians who often encourage military to encroach into the political arena. Post-1947 political history of South Asia clearly illustrates this point.

The caretaker Government of Bangladesh, with the active support of the military, had been trying to "put the derailed statecraft back on the track" with notable success in some areas. The whole nation is now eagerly looking forward to a general election at the end of the year that would be free, fair and transparent. Hopefully that would pave the way for a return to democratic order. Meanwhile, speculations about the NSC are growing, often casting doubts in the minds of many about its efficacy as well as its impact on the political arena. Before proceeding any further, let us examine what NSC is and how it functions in other countries.

The oldest, most well-organized and functional NSC is of the United States of America (USA). The US National Security Council was established in 1947 and since 1949 has been a part of the Executive Office of the President. From the height of the Cold War to the Korean and Vietnam War to the present Global War on Terror, NSC has been a small but effective organ to provide the US President with objective advice. NSC is chaired by the President. Statutory members are: the Vice President, the Secretary of State, the Secretary of the Treasury, the Secretary of Defense, and the Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), the senior most military advisor to the Council, and the Director of National Intelligence is the intelligence advisor. A few other senior policy makers attend on invitation on regular basis or when matters pertaining to their areas of responsibilities are on the agenda. The NSC is the US President's principal forum where he considers national security and foreign policy matters

with his senior advisors and cabinet officials. While the Secretary of Defense (Minister for Defence in our case) is a statutory member of the NSC, the Chairman of the JCS is an advisor, as is the Intelligence Chief. Despite military's important role in shaping the American defence, security and foreign policies, the civilian control of the US military is absolute.

Unlike the USA, NSC in Turkey is dominated by the military. In Turkey, NSC is a constitutional body composed of the Chief of General Staff, who is the highest ranking military officer, Commanders of the four branches of the Armed Forces and a select members of the Council of Ministers. Although the President of the Republic nominally heads the NSC, it is dominated by the military, and through the NSC the military exercises strong influence in running the state. The military perceives itself as the defender of what is termed as Kemalism a proactive form of secularism and nationalism. The military high command had staged coups in 1960, 1971, 1980 and 1997 ousting elected governments; those, in their terms, were constitutional moves to safeguard the Turkish state. Role of the military in politics has been one of the impediments to Turkey's entry into the European Union (EU). Although reform has been carried out over the last one decade to dilute the power of the NSC and increase the civilian control of the military, the military continues to wield enormous influence in almost every aspect of Turkish public life.

Within South Asia, India, and Pakistan have established NSC, albeit of very different characteristics. NSC in Pakistan, formed in April 2004, has thirteen members. Besides the President, the other members of the Council are the Prime Minister, the Chairman of the Senate, the Speaker and the Leader of the Opposition of the National Assembly, the Chief Ministers of the Provinces, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee (JCSC) and the Chiefs of Staff of the Army, Navy and Air Force. The stated purpose of the NSC is to serve as a forum for

consultation for the President and the federal government on matters of national security and crisis management in general. However, in reality, NSC has been more of a showpiece because Gen Pervez Musharraf was holding the post of the Army Chief as well as the President, and needed little consultation. Now that a civilian elected government has returned to Pakistan, it would be interesting to note how the NSC functions and how the balance of power is maintained.

Indian National Security Council was established in November 1998 as the apex agency looking into the nations' political, economic, energy and strategic security concerns. The organisation is headed by the National Security Advisor (NSA). Besides the NSA, other members of the NSC are: Ministers of Defence, External Affairs, Home, Finance and Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission. Other members may be invited to attend as and when required. Unlike Pakistan, Services Chiefs are not the members of the NSC. Indian NSC is a three-tiered organisation that comprises of the Strategic Policy Group (SPG), the National Security Advisory Board (NSAB) and a Secretariat represented by the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC). Services Chiefs, along with a number of secretaries and high officials are members of the SPG that undertakes Strategic Defence Review that analyses short and long term security threats, as well as possible policy options on a priority basis. The NSAB consists of persons of eminence outside the Government with expertise in external and internal security, strategic analysis, foreign affairs, defence, science and technology and economics. The board meets at least once a month, and more frequently as required. It provides a long-term prognosis and analysis to the NSC, and recommends solutions and address policy issues referred to it. The JIC analyzes intelligence data from civilian and military intelligence agencies and provides secretarial support to the NSC.

While going through the evolution of NSC in the countries discussed above, we find that the composition and the terms of

reference of the NSC may vary widely. From a merely specialised advisory body as in the case of India, to a powerful constitutional body as in Turkey, the NSC can come in various shapes, and sizes. The characteristics of the NSC in Bangladesh would depend on what the aspirations of the people are. There is no denying of the fact that we need a small and efficient government. Our experience with a 60-member cabinet with innumerable committees and commissions have been one of utter failure. Adding another advisory body to a dinosaur-like government might further slow down the decision making process.

The need for a National Security Council to advise the US President was felt in the Cold War scenario when nuclear-armed missiles of the NATO and Warsaw Pact countries were ready to launch against each other in a matter of minutes. India and Pakistan established the NSC when both became declared nuclear powers and were on the edge of full-scale war on a number of occasions. In the case of Bangladesh, none of these situations exists. There is no conventional military threat against Bangladesh in the horizon. Our security threats are internal and primarily domestic in nature. Security forces are quite capable of meeting these challenges. What we need to do, however, is to establish a democratic order, ensure participation of people in the decision-making process and in the long run, strive for social justice and equity. Forming an NSC will not be the right prescription for these maladies. ANSC that exists merely to support and sustain any interest group is not worth having at all. Inducting military hierarchy in the political loop had also been disastrous, both for the political system as well as the military professionalism; India and Pakistan are the contrasting examples. If we wish to have the NSC, the best would be to debate it on public forum as well as in the Parliament. Unless an organisation enjoys popular support, it is bound to wither away; NSC will be no exception.

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DAGR Helo rocket excels in latest test: Lockheed

The U.S. Army is monitoring the development of laser-guided, precision 2.75-inch Hydra rockets able to place 35-pound missiles within one meter of target from up to 12,000 meters away, service officials said April 8 at the Army Aviation Association of America Convention in National Harbor, Md.

"I would love a precision-fire ability and there is a requirement for 2.75 but right now we don't have a funded program. Several manufacturers are doing development on precision rockets," said U.S. Army Col. Mark Hayes, capabilities manager, U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC).

Lockheed Martin's DAGR semi-active laser-guided Hydra rocket is a key contender for the Army's requirement, which emerged out of combat experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan, Army officials said. Helicopter pilots often seek to destroy small moving targets such as insurgents in a pickup truck while minimizing collateral damage and reducing risk of injury to civilians, Army officials said. Currently, the Army does not have a precision-guided rocket smaller than a Hellfire to fire from aircraft, Army and Lockheed officials said.

"Most of the technology is mature at this point, so there are a lot of things you can do on the end of a 2.75 inch rocket. It depends on what the technology readiness level is and what kind of money you want to commit to it," Hayes said.

Test-fired March 29 at Eglin Air Force Base, Fla., the DAGR 2.75-inch rocket hit targets at 2.5 and 3 kilometers within a meter of the laser-designated target, said John Morris, director of business development for Lockheed Martin Missiles and Fire Control.

In development with Lockheed's own internal funding since 2006, the DAGR program has five more test firings this year before being more fully integrated into a yet-to-be announced platform.

"Any platform that fires Hellfire today could fire DAGR, including the Cobra, Apache, Little Bird, Black Hawk, the Predator UAV and the ERMP," said Randy Thomas, a business development manager with Lockheed. "It fires just like a Hellfire, but the difference is instead of delivering a very large warhead, you are doing to deliver a 10-pound smaller warhead and less collateral damage. DAGR is about taking that small warhead on the Hydra 70 and making it as precise as a Hellfire without having to change anything on the aircraft."

Denmark to reinforce Afghan deployment

Denmark's defense ministry said April 8 it was sending extra helicopters and troops to Afghanistan, where it has suffered one of the highest per capita death tolls among coalition forces.

"In the context of efforts aimed at strengthening

the security of troops [already] deployed, it has been decided to reinforce the Danish contribution in Afghanistan with reconnaissance helicopters," a statement read.

Between two and four Fennec craft as well as some 50-75 staff will be mobilized in about two months, it added.

The ministry cited spring growth of vegetation hindering visibility for ground troops as a factor behind the decision. Spokesman Jacob Winther also told AFP that the reinforcements were agreed independently of NATO requests for extra resources around last week's summit in Bucharest, Romania.

"It's because of security [concerns] over our own soldiers," Winther said.

Denmark presently has some 550 troops stationed in Helmand province, southern Afghanistan, under British command.

The March 31 killing of a Danish soldier in Afghan fighting raised the country's combat death toll to 14, with most having died in the past year amid a resurgence of Taliban fighting.

The Danish daily Politiken has published photographs of the dead, with U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates subsequently highlighting Denmark's "significant" share of the alliance "burden" amid a shortfall experienced by the 43,000-strong NATO-led International Security Assistance Force.

India, Germany conduct naval exercises

India and Germany are holding their first-ever joint sea exercises in Indian waters from April 7, a follow-up of the Indo-German Defence Cooperation Agreement signed in 2006.

Manned by 700 personnel, the German flotilla included three warships, FGS Hamburg, FGS Köln and FGS Berlin, commanded by Capt. Michael Budde.

The joint exercise, scheduled to last for about 10 hours, will include seamanship exercise, communication, exchange of personnel and flying exercises, a senior Indian Navy official said.

Two Indian Navy frigates, INS Tir and INS Krishna, and a helicopter and training ships are representing the Indian Navy manned by 300 personnel.

The defense cooperation agreement signed in 2006 opened the doors for German technology transfer to India and provided the framework for holding joint naval exercises and other interaction between their armed forces, said a diplomat of the German Embassy.

Germany is keen to compete for the Indian Navy's intended purchase of six new submarines worth \$4 billion. In the first Indo-German High Defence Committee meeting held here last year, Germany assured India it would include technology transfer whenever possible in armament procurement and joint weapon development programs.

SOURCE: www.defensenews.com

The decline of Annapolis and changes to the regional strategic environment

KHALED KHALEFEH

CURRENT US foreign policy in the Middle East is being strongly neutralized for different reasons:

1. The status of President George Bush as a lame duck president at the end of his term.

2. The effects of the domestic financial crisis in the US, its implications to the global economy and the deterioration of the dollar.

3. The lack of a political consensus among the different political institutions in the States (the White House, the Congress, the army) towards Iraq.

Both Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Vice President Dick Cheney are conducting a maintenance policy of monitoring the situation while giving the impression that everything is under control. At the same time, they are again strengthening Israel as a key, strategic regional ally of the US in the Middle East.

In his visit to Israel (22-24 March 2008), Dick Cheney reiterated and assumed the consolidation of Israel-American relations, especially the commitment to defend Israel. He also confirmed to Israeli politicians and the military establishment his strategic concerns about Iran and any Iranian threat to the role of Israel in the region. Cheney also reviewed all the options on the table towards Iran (his meeting with Olmert, 22 March 2008).

Concerning Iraq, Cheney urged the Arab countries to reestablish diplomatic relations with the pro-American appointed government of Jawad al-Maliki. Dick Cheney perceives the current occupation in Iraq and the existence of the American military forces in Iraq as the final stage, which is not negotiable. In other words, the US will stay forever on this stage, according to Cheney's perceptions.

Vice President Dick Cheney, the architect of the first Gulf War and the occupation of Iraq in 2003, is the former head of Halliburton, one of the contracting companies that currently is doing a great deal of business in Iraq.

At the same time, however, Cheney would continue the Bush endless track of negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. In that framework, he visited Mohammed Abbas in Ramallah, along with American Security Coordinator General Dayton, General James Jones and General William Frazier, and urged

him to continue with the Israeli track.

In Jerusalem, he declared that he will never impose any pressure on Israel to push for a solution, an argument that means that there is no relationship between Israeli policy with the Palestinians and American conduct in the Arab world, mainly in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Dick Cheney believes that Iraq is a key strategic country with a proven reserve of oil, which America has to control and seize. Iraq is also a strategic key that can formulate any Arab coalition toward Arab unity. For that reason, he and his administration believe in the necessity of destroying and controlling Iraq, and diminishing it as a state. In that sense, Israel is playing an important role in dismantling this coalition, according to Dick Cheney's perception.

Israeli politicians from Peres to Barak are aware of Cheney's weakness as a result of his latest visit. They have recommended that the US deal mainly with Iran while he remains in office. President Peres went even further when he asked Cheney to understand the Israeli refusal to withdraw from the Golan Heights because Syria is a potential ally of Iran.

Concerning the Palestinians, Dick Cheney continues to support the status quo of further strikes against Hamas and continuing a conditional and endless dialogue with Abu Mazen. This is consistent with the American Road Map of supporting the Palestinian security force in order to confront Hamas.

Madam Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice arrived at the end of March 2008 in order to monitor any theoretical negotiations between the PA and Israel, in order to hint to the Arab Summit in Damascus that the US is doing something. Actually, she also wants to give the same impression to the Arab world that with her visit to Israel, she is trying to push something forward from Annapolis. Nevertheless, Ms. Rice's main purpose was to hold some contacts in order to neutralize the Arab Summit, mainly concerning crucial issues, such as an agreement on the Lebanese front, Iraq, Gaza, the Sana Declaration and Darfur. It seems that she might have succeeded because Egypt and Saudi Arabia, in coordination with the US, did not send high profile representatives to the Summit, such as their president and king.

Dick Cheney, however, did prepare the ground for Condoleezza Rice before her departure from Washington. Consequently, his visit

was not received very well in the region. He came to the Palestinians with empty hands, threatened the Iranians and the Syrians, and did not learn the lessons of Iraq. The Arab media largely ignored him. They were very sorry for the warm reception they had given George Bush because they believed in the real "will" of the Americans. However, they soon realized that the Annapolis experience was aimed to strengthen

Bush domestically.

The current administration is aware of the limitations of its capabilities. It is quite certain that it will not strike Iran. Israel also has read the American map of a weak president who cannot be helpful. It will, therefore, be very difficult to conduct any military adventure against Hezbollah or Syria.

Hezbollah, however, is also aware of its strategic choices and read the

strategic environment very well. Hassan Nassrallah mentioned these Israeli strategic choices in a speech marking the end of 40 days of mourning for Imam Mughniyah assassinated in Damascus. The \$64,000 question is, therefore, who will shoot first? Who will act or react in order to change the current strategic environment.

The author is a journalist and member of The Arab Council for Foreign Relations.

