

National Security Council for Bangladesh

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Once sat in a high profile meeting when the country had an elected government as a Director General in the Foreign Ministry. Those who attended that meeting were the Ministers of Foreign and Home Affairs with their respective Secretary and top level representatives of civil and military intelligence. Security issues were on top of the agenda of that meeting. I was astonished to learn at that meeting that on crucial national security issues, the Foreign Minister was in total darkness and that intelligence available to the military was unknown to the civil intelligence. At the Home Ministry, what the Secretary knew was not in his Minister's knowledge. Since that strange meeting, I always felt Bangladesh needed a National Security Council for a professional and transparent way to deal with national security and intelligence issues that are vital for formulating the country's foreign and defense policies.

A National Security Council or its equivalent is now an essential part of governments of most countries. It has become indispensable for professionally integrating intelligence and security issues into well considered foreign and defense policies for maintaining sovereignty and furthering national interests in an increasingly globalized world. It has been an integral part of Government in the United States since it was set up under the Presidency of President Harry Truman. In India, it was set up in 1998 when the BJP Government was in office. National Security Council of Pakistan in its current version was created in April 2004 by an Act.

Historically, National Security Council has followed a perceptible pattern in evolution. Countries with strong democratic

foundations have evolved one type of NSC while a country where the presence of the military is strong has evolved a different type. The United States and India are good examples of the first type where the military and intelligence agencies are given a place in the NSC in advisory roles. Turkey is an example of the second type where its NSC called the Milli Guvenlik Kurulu has institutionalized Turkish military's dominance and influence over politics.

A NSC for Bangladesh is not a new idea. A circular was issued by the Cabinet Division in 1996 creating a 23 member NSC headed by the Prime Minister. It was given a wide range of responsibilities ranging from ensuring national security to accountability of the Government as well as dealing with internal problems tied to security. But the concept was stillborn and fizzled till this Government came to office. Going by what one reads in the newspapers, a NSC for Bangladesh seems imminent with a few suggesting that it will be in place as early as end of May.

Not everybody is of course excited that a NSC is imminent for Bangladesh. A great deal of doubt has arisen within the public as the concept has not been debated at any length by this Government. In the absence of the parliament, there is also no forum to debate this issue in a manner that can take all concerns on board. A few seminars by think tanks have attempted to debate the issue. Unfortunately, these seminars have added more doubt in the public mind. In one well-publicized seminar held recently, a sponsor went to the extent of stating to the media that a NSC should be constituted immediately in order to allow the country to benefit from all the positive developments that this Government has achieved after 1/11. His statement left no one in

doubt that he was suggesting that unless the military is given a major role through the NSC, democracy would be in peril when an elected Government comes.

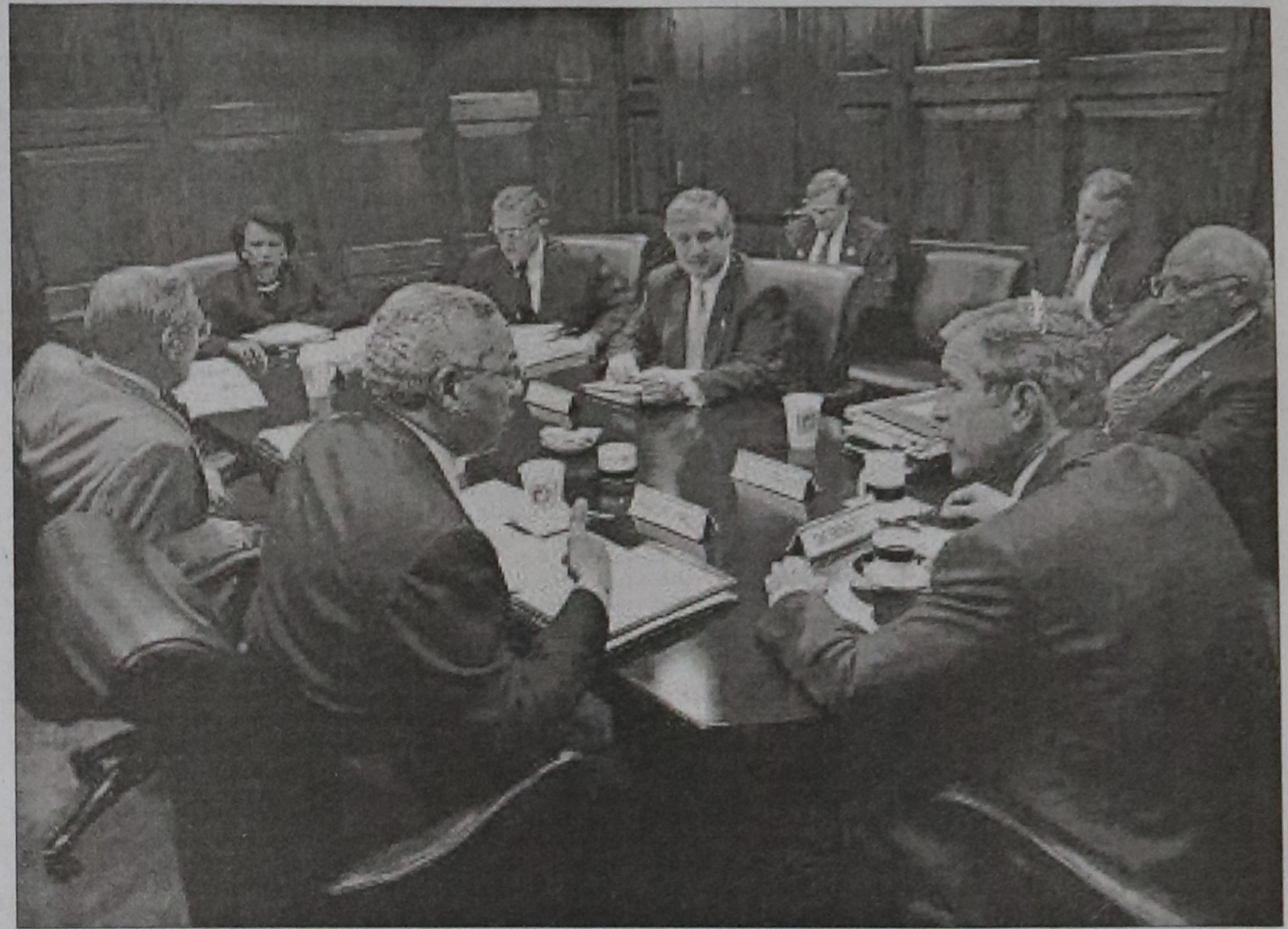
Therefore, in establishing a NSC in Bangladesh, a few issues must be settled first for such a Council not to be again stillborn like the attempt in 1996. Before it is delivered, it must be absolutely clear to the public that a NSC is not a civil versus military issue and that it is not a covert way of bringing the military into politics. It must also be made absolutely clear that, the mess into which the politicians have landed the country notwithstanding, the supremacy of elected representatives over un-elected ones is an undeniable fact in dealing with sovereignty into jeopardy by internal conflicts. Given our ethos as a nation where we perhaps stand uniquely on our own for sacrifices for establishing democracy, we should therefore choose as a model the US type of NSC with modifications to suit our needs (we need not have a very complex one as the US NSC is) while be careful in not going after the Turkish model that give too much prominence to the military.

A NSC for Bangladesh should be a two-tiered body. The apex tier should be headed by the Prime Minister. This body should meet at regular intervals to consider issues/papers/documents prepared by the second tier and give policy decisions on issues of national security. In addition to considering national security and intelligence issues that have direct relation to sovereignty or threat to it arising from external sources, the NSC should also be entrusted with internal crisis

management that threatens sovereignty. The apex tier should in addition to the Prime Minister, have as members the Leader of the Opposition, Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Home Affairs, and Defense (why should the Prime Minister hold this portfolio? Is politics involved here?), the Chief of the Army (in place of a Joint Chief of Staff that we do not have in Bangladesh) and the Cabinet Secretary. Chiefs of civil and military intelligence should sit in NSC meetings as advisors. The second tier should comprise bureaucrats from the Ministry of Home Affairs, Foreign Affairs, Defense, Army, Navy and Air Force, the civil and military intelligence agencies, the Police and BDR. In developing such a NSC, the task of coordination and smooth flow of intelligence and information between the military, security and civilians in the second tier should be given utmost importance. A post of a National Security Adviser (NSA) should be created directly under the Prime Minister for this purpose. The NSA should be a very senior retired diplomat or an armed forces officer who should carry the rank of a Minister. In a Government structure already too bloated for reasons of rationality, the NSA could use bureaucrats at the Prime Minister's Office where a Director General with requisite number of officials could provide the NSA administrative support. Issues of national security and intelligence are matters that, despite the need for transparency, cannot be made public knowledge.

Then again, the NSC must not use such a necessity to become an extra-constitutional body. It must be accountable to the Parliament through the Prime Minister.

The inclusion of the Leader of the Opposition should allow bipartisanship in dealing with crucial national issues, some-



A US National Security Council in session

thing sadly lacking in our system of governance.

The military and intelligence agencies have always been dealing with security and intelligence issues keeping those in charge constitutionally to deal with such issues in darkness in the absence of an established procedure or structure. The BNP and the AL Governments allowed the military and intelligence agencies de facto veto power in security and intelligence issues in manner that was non-transparent and did not

always serve the best interest of the nation. A NSC will allow a professional and transparent way of cooperation between the civil, military and intelligence agencies and integration of national security and intelligence issues into defense and foreign policies in the best interest of the country.

The necessity of a NSC cannot be over-emphasized. At the same time, it may not be wise to hurry in through because doubts have arisen in the public mind caused, no doubt, by some over-enthusias-

tic people. Recently, Justice Habibur Rahman, former Chief Adviser, said in a seminar that military's interference in politics cannot benefit the country; his statement created substantial vibes in the public mind. Some politicians have also spoken publicly that the armed forces are seeking a safe exit for themselves given the fact that they have upset the politicians by their drive against widespread corruption in politics and governance. The Army Chief's most recent meeting

with senior editors where he has clearly these misgivings categorically is very encouraging. Still doubts linger. Therefore, the imperative of a NSC for Bangladesh notwithstanding, it may be wise for this Government to draw the concept paper of a well thought out NSC and leave it to the elected Government to deliver it as an integral part of executive branch of the Government under the wings of the Prime Minister.

The author is a former ambassador.

S. Korea to buy 21 more fighters from Boeing

South Korea will buy 21 fighter jets from Boeing by 2012, bringing to 61 the total number of its next-generation fighters, the defence ministry said April 25.

A government panel approved a 2.3 trillion won (\$2.3 billion) contract to buy F-15K fighter jets from Boeing, said the Defence Acquisition Program Administration (DAPA) of the defence ministry.

South Korea has already purchased 40 F-15Ks at a cost of \$4.6 billion. The last 10 of the 40 jets will be delivered later this year.

The new aircraft will be delivered between 2010 and 2012.

"The new aircraft are expected to make up for the aging fighter jets and bolster strategic deterrence," a spokesman for the DAPA told journalists.

South Korea wants to increase the number of so-called next-generation fighter jets to 120 by 2020 to better counter threats from its neighbours, according to the air force.

US Marines launch major new Afghan operation

US Marines pushed into a stronghold of extremist Taliban resistance in southernmost Afghanistan on April 29, in their first major operation since deploying to Afghanistan last month.

The Marines, supported by British soldiers based in the southern province of Helmand, launched the operation to "enhance security" in the district of Garmser, NATO's International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) said.

Garmser in southern Helmand is an area of difficult desert terrain that extends to the Pakistan border, across which Taliban reinforcements and weapons are said to arrive to enter a growing insurgency.

Soldiers with the 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit, based in the neighboring province of Kandahar, were airlifted into forward bases in the area last week or moved in on convoys, ISAF said.

From there, they launched the operation named Azada Wosa, which means Be Free in the Pashtu language of southern and eastern Afghanistan.

Military officials could not say how many soldiers were involved for security reasons.

The abandoned town of Garmser, once a thriving market town about 200 kilometers (120 miles) from the Pakistan border, is only partially in government control.

It has a small British base where Prince Harry was stationed for some of his 10-week tour that ended in March, when it was exposed in the media.

British troops stationed across Helmand helped the Marines move through the province and into place, a British military spokesman said.

The area of the operation is known to have strong Taliban influence, Lt. Col. Robin Matthews added.

ISAF commanders were using the Marines as a "strategic tool," he said. "Clearly, they want to have an effect on the area south of Garmser."

The Marines started deploying in March to help ISAF forces after a difficult year in 2007, the deadliest in an insurgency launched after the Taliban were able to regroup following their ouster from government in late 2001.

This year is expected to be just as tough and ISAF has been amassing extra troops and equipment for the battle.

The unrest routinely steps up over spring. The last week has seen several incidents across the country.

Military officials say Helmand is a nest of hardcore Taliban fighters supported by international Islamic "jihadists" and the center of Afghanistan's booming opium and heroin trade.

India's space agency puts satellites into orbit

India has launched another military satellite, the CARTOSAT-2A, using a homegrown rocket.

The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) announced that its Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV)-C9 launched the 690-kilogram CARTOSAT-2A and nine other satellites on April 28.

"In its thirteenth flight conducted from Satish Dhawan Space Centre ... ISRO's Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle, PSLV-C9, successfully launched the 690-kg Indian remote sensing satellite CARTOSAT-2A, the 83-kg Indian Mini Satellite (IMS-1) and eight nanosatellites for international customers into a 637-km polar Sun Synchronous Orbit (SSO)," an ISRO statement said. "PSLV-C9 in its 'core-alone' configuration launched 10 satellites with a total weight of about 820 kilograms."

CARTOSAT-2A's camera can provide images with better than 1-meter spatial resolution and a swath of 10 kilometers, an ISRO official said.

Defence Ministry sources said CARTOSAT-2A will be used for military purposes as well.

The ISRO launched CARTOSAT-2, an advanced remote sensing satellite capable of providing scene-specific spot imagery, in January 2007. The Indian defence forces also use images from the CARTOSAT-1 series of satellites, launched in 2005.

To meet its intelligence gathering needs, especially in the mountainous terrain of Kashmir, the military wants a satellite with a resolution of half a meter, with a capability for accurate mapping and three-dimensional modelling, a senior Indian Army official said.

In January, India placed an Israeli satellite, the TECSAR, into polar orbit using the homegrown PSLV-C10.

Source: www.defensenews.com

Islam, Muslims and terrorism

ASGHAR ALI ENGINEER

ISLAM is being invariably associated with terrorism both in media as well as in political circles, especially in Western countries. When they hear it being condemned by Muslim theologians, it is celebrated as something unusual. It is strange irony of both misunderstanding and motivated propaganda that if a small band of Osama's followers give call for jihad, it is taken as authentic Islamic call and if it is condemned by mainstream Islamic theologians, it is accepted with mixed feelings of celebration and skepticism. The mainstream condemnation of terrorism is somehow not accepted with conviction.

When the Darul Ulum Deoband, a leading Islamic seminary in Asia, held an anti-terrorism conference the media spotlighted it and number of articles and editorials were written in mainstream media. There was underlying skepticism that how thousands of 'Ulamas and imams could gather together in such large numbers, to denounce terrorism. In fact when media unceasingly targeted Islam for terrorism, these 'Ulamas thought it necessary to do so to convince their non-Muslim friends that Islam does not stand for terrorism.

In fact it was hardly necessary to do so as all Muslim theologians know fully well that there is no link, whatsoever, between Islam and terrorism but due to such continuing attacks, Muslim theologians had to issue a declaration condemning terrorism. Let it be noted that not only Osama bin Laden but not a single leading member of Al-Qaida is a qualified theologian. They are all modern educated youth or politicians. Among Taliban too, there is no theologian of any credible standing. Some of them may be product of madrasas in North West Frontier province of Pakistan but they never went for higher Islamic studies. They never got beyond preliminary Islamic education. It was their political bosses who decided courses of action and formulated policies invoking 'jihad' to justify their acts of terrorism.

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Never any major theologian ever justified acts of terrorism. None of the major Islamic thinkers and theologians from West Asia issued any fatwa approving of terrorism as jihad. Yusuf Qardawi, a well-known theologian and highly respected by orthodox Muslims, condemned terrorism and suicide bombing killing of innocent people.

a well-known theologian and highly respected by orthodox Muslims, condemned terrorism and suicide bombing killing of innocent people. A conference of leading Muslim scholars also condemned suicide bombing as un-Islamic. Qur'an is so clear on the issue along with hadith literature that save on political grounds, no one can approve of the acts of terrorism.

There are in all forty-one verses in Qur'an on jihad and not a single verse uses it for war or violence. In early twentieth century when terrorism, like today, was not the issue, a noted scholar of Islam Maulavi Chiragh Ali wrote a scholarly book on jihad and showed that not even once the word jihad has been used for war or violence in Qur'an. It is really a landmark work for those who want to understand meaning of jihad in Qur'an.

The prophet of Islam (PBUH) himself never fought any war of aggression; he fought battles only in defense. Most of the battles Prophet fought were in and around Madina where he had migrated to, to escape severe prosecution from his and Islam's enemies in Mecca. It is the opponents of Islam who attacked Madina and the Prophet fought back. He followed the injunction of the Qur'an, "And fight in the way of Allah those who fight against you but be not aggressive. Surely Allah does not love aggressors. (2:190)."

This Qur'anic verse is self-explanatory and does not need any elaboration. How prophet could have violated this injunction from high on in his own lifetime? The real problem is that one fails to distinguish what is theological and what is political. Many Muslims had their own political interests and they conveniently invoked doctrine of jihad for their political project as Osama bin Laden has been doing in our own

times. The invocation of jihad for political purposes is post-Qur'anic development. The Prophet would have never approved it. Those who kept away from political struggle for power like Sufis, gave jihad a very different meaning. According to Sufis love and peace is the basis of Islam and jihad is spiritual struggle to control one's desires. In other words real jihad is war against one's own desires, as it is selfish desires which require human beings to resort to violence.

In fact Sufis always kept themselves away from political power struggle and believed in leading peaceful life and emphasized doctrine of sulh-i-kul (total peace and peace with all). Since they never involved themselves in political power struggle they led simple life and busied themselves in suppressing their desires and tried to achieve what Qur'an calls nafs mutma'innah (i.e. peaceful and satisfied soul). This could be possible only if one controlled one's desires.

It was Sufi Islam, which was most popular among the masses, as Muslim masses also had nothing to do with wars for political domination. Sufis believed in controlling themselves rather than control others. One needs violence only when one wants to control others, other than oneself. Since Sufis controlled themselves they avoided violence and political desire to control others and hence justify the use of violence.

All empire builders use violence and then justify it in the name of religion or patriotism or security. America today uses violence on largest scale imaginable and causes havoc because it wants to control the whole world for its material resources. It attacked Afghanistan, Iraq and Vietnam before, only to control oil and other resources. And as the

Vietnamese were forced to fight in their own way, now Osama and his followers are doing likewise.

Of course there is a big difference between Vietnam's fight against American aggression and Osama bin Laden's use of violence. Vietnam was a country and it was defending itself and Osama is a fugitive from Saudi, represents no country and leads the "al-Qaida" group founded by him and uses hit and run tactics and involves innocent citizens in his attacks. Osama has not been authorized by any country, much less by any religious authority, to attack. All leading theologians always condemned him for his terrorism.

The problem with media is it never goes in depth. It has no time for that. Its news is related to events and particularly negative events. What we call investigative journalism is rare and again in-depth analysis appeals to intellectuals, not to average readers. Then add to this hostile attitude, political agenda of certain vested interests, Zionist lobby in USA and USA's own justification of war of aggression against Muslim countries and one can understand why western media projects Islam as a religion of jihad and terrorism.

There is great need to understand various parallel trends in the Islamic world today. Media reporting and statements of certain political leaders has developed a stereotype that Muslims are essentially jihadis and united in their fight against non-Muslims. When we are hostile to a community or a nation, we homogenize it and look for negative traits ignoring diversity and complexities.

It is no different when it comes to Islam and Muslims. Since theologians tend to speak of Islam and not Muslims, a message goes that there is one single understanding of Islam and all Muslims fall in line with this theological Islam.

Sociological and cultural differences in understanding of Islam is totally ignored. Apart from Sufis there are several Muslim sects who do not approve of use of violence as integral part of Islam.

It would be of great interest to know that among all other Islamic sects Isma'ilis consider jihad as one of the seven pillars of Islam (generally Muslims believe in five pillars) as at one time in history Isma'ilis were involved in long struggle for power with Abbasids and yet today Isma'ili communities throughout the world are most peaceful communities. This clearly shows that violence is political, not religious necessity.

Christians too, despite Biblical doctrine of love and presenting other cheek if slapped on one cheek, came out with the theory of 'Holy War' during crusades and the Geeta pronounced concept of dharmayuddha. We find so much violence in Buddhist countries like Sri Lanka and Thailand. Thus it would be seen that all religions talk of love and peace and all religions permit use of violence in defense. But the followers often misuse the concept of defensive violence for aggressive purposes.

Media may have its own compulsions, politicians may have their own needs, but scholars should not buy their formulations. They must fight their own prejudices and go for in depth understanding of issues. Intellectuals and scholars should be committed to quest for truth as peace and non-violence is not possible without truth. Gandhiji insisted on truth and even said truth is God in order to promote peace and non-violence.

War needs propaganda for its justification and propaganda is based on half-truths and outright lies but peace needs truth and nothing but truth. It is quest for truth which brings peace of soul - nafs-i-mutma'innah or shanti.

Desire for controlling others and political power creates unrest and violence. Today Middle East is a war torn zone as it sits over unlimited source of oil. It is control over oil which tempts America to attack Arab countries and people like Osama indulge in reactive violence. Terrorism is reactive violence whereas state violence is active violence. Thus terrorism is not all about jihad but reaction to American violence for its lust for oil.

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