

Our foreign policy and the foreign ministry

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RETIRED Ambassadors were unanimous on two issues in a Round Table (RT) organized by The Daily Star (TDS) and the Centre for Foreign Affairs Studies (CFAS) recently. First, foreign policy is not important in governance in Bangladesh. Second, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) of Bangladesh is "the weakest in the world". It is not that these apprehensions are new. People informed on these issues have known these for a long time.

What is new and important is that this RT has brought foreign policy and the MFA into focus at a time when it is in our national interest to do so. Since the fall of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, international relations are being rewritten faster than most nations can keep pace. Globalization and 9/11 have added new dimensions in international politics that nations have to adapt on a continuous basis for furthering national interests, making successful conduct of foreign policy crucial to all Governments. As a consequence of it all, Foreign Ministries all over the world have gained more power and influence. The TDS-CFAS RT in this context is a timely warning that Bangladesh is harming its own national interests by going against the trend.

It is a pity that we find ourselves in this situation today. We were liberated by blood in 1971 at a time when international law did not favour liberation by exercise of the right of self-determination. It was sheer merit of our cause, heroism of our people and the genocide of the Pakistani Army that swept world opinion in our favour when such was not the case in similar efforts in Sri Lanka and Nigeria where the Biafran struggle dissipated. Immediately after our liberation, it was because of our successful foreign policy that we swiftly became members of the UN, OIC and other world bodies,

and established bilateral relations with most of the countries of the world. The MFA successfully charted the course for the nation that allowed Bangladesh safe landing and acceptance in the committee of nations. By 1979, we won a seat at the UN Security Council defeating Japan. In 1981, we came close to becoming the President of the UN General Assembly, a position we lost to Iraq by a coin toss after a tie on the votes cast.

By the time President Ershad usurped power, foreign policy and MFA were on the decline. One major reason for this is interesting in the period immediately after liberation, when foreign policy was important, MFA officials led by the ex-Pakistan Foreign Service (PFS) officers were enjoying both recognition and prominence. The elite members of the ex-Civil Service of Pakistan (CSP) were at that time in particular threat from the politicians. Some of the senior members of this service made an informal proposal to the ex-PFS officers in the MFA to form a Foreign Service Cadre together that was snubbed by the latter on the principle of inter seniority. That was a mistake for by the time Ershad came, these ex-CSP officers were very powerful. In fact, some senior ex-CSP officers helped Ershad overthrow the elected Government of Justice Sattar and became very close to him. Ershad disliked the Foreign Service that these ex-CSP officers used to full measure. They systematically destroyed the MFA, dividing the entire gamut of foreign relations into diplomatic, aid, trade, consular and other components, and distributing all except the diplomatic to a number of Ministries, Division and agencies and incorporated the changes into the Rules of Business.

The MFA and foreign policy had thus been relegated to the backseat by the time Ershad fell. Elected Governments that returned in 1991 carried forward the trend although

our national interests required greater attention and importance to foreign policy to adjust to the new and emerging realities of a post Cold War world. While other countries strengthened their Foreign Ministry to meet new challenges that also opened new opportunities, we weakened it. Instead of attempting to remove these reservations, he built upon it to be on her right side. In a now well-known tirade, he humiliated India at a Seminar in 2004 in unbelievable language to win the PM's attention. It is therefore no wonder that while India is for geopolitical and other reasons our most important neighbor, we do not have an India policy. In fact, substantive matters with India are not dealt by the MFA and often Ministries who deal with these issues keep the MFA in darkness! We have not demarcated our maritime boundary with India. We have failed to uphold our best interests in multilateral economic negotiations where our performance at WTO negotiations, led by the Commerce Ministry, was so miserable that we were officially extended support by the UN to develop the negotiating skills of those who represent us there, skills available to MFA officers but not used. The sum total of neglect to foreign affairs and weakening the MFA has marginalized Bangladesh. We have no articulated and coordinated policy on issues as critical as climate change and global warming, on our interests in the WTO, on how to deal with India, etc.

The MFA, sadly, has helped this process rather than stand against it. Those in leadership roles in the Ministry opted for their personal interests, like promotions and postings instead of opposing the efforts of those in power to relegate foreign affairs into the back drawer and make MFA weak. They allowed influx of army officers whose seniority destroyed the morale of the directly recruited officers. They also failed to oppose for fear of upsetting the Prime Minister and the PMO, wrong decisions taken at

the latter's behest like the NAM Chairmanship in 1998 and Salauddin Qader Chowdhury's nomination for the OIC Secretary General's post in 2004 which given to any other candidate of MFA's choice could have won Bangladesh the post.

The need now is to reverse this process and allow the MFA to play a major role in formulating and implementing the country's foreign policy for the sake of Bangladesh. This is the trend worldwide and therefore is nothing new. An example of how MFA functions elsewhere was given at the TDS-CFAS RT. One Ambassador who was High Commissioner in India said at the RT that after he and the then Indian Finance Minister had fixed the



latter's visit to Dhaka, the Finance Minister called the High Commissioner to inform him that he was embarrassed to cancel the visit because the Joint Secretary of the Bangladesh Division at the Indian External Affairs Ministry thought the dates were not suitable. Another retired Ambassador gave the example of Brazil where their MFA is the government within the government, a trend that most nations are now following in one degree or another.

It is simply our national interest that requires functions of aid, external trade and expatriate welfare to be given to the MFA together with the coordinating role for foreign policy related functions now being handled by other Ministries. The former NBR

Chairman Badir Raman made a very good case of this by stating in a talk show that with less than one digit dependence on foreign aid in our development needs, it is a disgrace that we have a Division called the ERD. In arguing the case of the Foreign Ministry, it may help us to bear in mind that in implementing foreign policy, diplomacy is of essence. Diplomacy is a specialized profession; the longer time one spends in this profession, the better that individual gets and the better that individual serves the country. The diplomatic cadre in Bangladesh works under the MFA. By bringing foreign policy related functions to the MFA, the country will have professionals dealing with such matters. Why would we do otherwise?

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The biggest challenge to evolving a foreign policy of Bangladesh to serve the best interests of the country will be to successfully bring the stakeholders such as the political parties, business groups, and civil societies into the loop in the process of formulation of foreign policy. Once Parliament is in place, the Parliamentary Committee for Foreign Affairs should be given a major role in foreign policy formulation where bipartisanship of political parties in approaching foreign policy issues should be made indispensable. Finally, under the elected Government, the country must have a Foreign Minister with background and qualifications for the job that we did not have in the 15 years of elected Government for which the country has suffered. The icing on the cake must come from the Prime Minister who must be the country's number one diplomat by taking a proactive and knowledge-based interest in foreign policy for which the bureaucratic walls that the PMO has created in the last 15 years should fall in favour of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Nuclear India: Ten years after Pokhran-II

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TEEN years ago, after conducting five nuclear tests on 11 and 13 May 1998, India declared itself a state with nuclear weapons. While many reasons like a quest for world power status were attributed to former Prime Minister Vajpayee's decision to bring India's nuclear weapons out of the closet, the primary motivation clearly stemmed from living in a dangerous nuclear neighbourhood with two inimical nuclear powers, China and Pakistan, colluding with each other to destabilise India through a nuclear warhead-ballistic missile nexus and a long-drawn proxy war under the nuclear shadow.

India's nuclear doctrine profess-

there is a broad national consensus that no first use is a viable policy. Consequently, India follows a 'counter value' targeting strategy aimed at destroying high-value cities and industrial centres, as against a 'counter force' strategy aimed at destroying the adversary's nuclear forces.

India's nuclear force structure is based on a triad: Surface-to-Surface missiles (Prithvi, Agni-I and Agni-II) with nuclear warheads manned by personnel of the artillery regiment of the Indian Army; nuclear glide bombs under slung on Jaguar, Mirage 2000 and SU-30 MKI fighter-bomber aircraft of the Indian Air Force; and, in due course, SLBMs on SSBNs (nuclear-powered submarines) of the Indian Navy. India has

armed adversaries.

India is generally estimated to have approximately 50 to 60 nuclear warheads and enough plutonium to manufacture 40-50 more. Hence, additional fissile material is necessary before the proposed FMCT comes into play if India's reactor-grade fissile material reserves that are susceptible to sub-optimal yields are not to be utilised. During peacetime, the nuclear cores are reported to be in the custody of scientists of the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) and the high explosive triggers in the custody of the Defense Research and Development Organisation (DRDO). Hence, India's nuclear warheads are not kept mated with the launchers, which are held by the armed forces. These measures together reduce the risk of accidental and inadvertent launch and enhance strategic stability.

India's nuclear weapons are firmly under civilian control. The National Command Authority (NCA) guides India's nuclear command and control system. The Prime Minister heads the Political Council of the NCA and the National Security Advisor heads the Executive Council. All policy decisions, including the decision to employ nuclear weapons, are vested in the Political Council. The Commander-in-Chief, Strategic Forces Command, advises the Chairman, Chiefs of Staff Committee and exercises operational and technical control over the nuclear forces. A chain of succession has been formulated. India has a National Command Post (NCP) that will act as a tri-Service operations centre. Rehearsals and joint exercises involving simulated retaliatory nuclear strikes are carried out periodically.

Besides the protection that a Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD) system provides, the quality of India's nuclear deterrence will be substantially enhanced. Hence, India should opt for a BMD system to destroy incoming missiles. Except for the fact that the Agni series of ballistic missiles require further testing and nuclear-powered submarines with SLBMs are still a long way from being deployed, India's nuclear deterrence is credible and fully operational.

India has been a strong advocate of total universal nuclear disarmament. Despite not having signed the NPT and the CTBT, India has voluntarily complied with all the key provisions of these treaties. India has renounced further nuclear testing and has an unblemished non-proliferation record among the nuclear weapons powers. It is in India's interest to work towards total nuclear disarmament.

anticipated damage to own nuclear forces in a first strike, escalation control, war termination strategies and unforeseen eventualities. Given these parameters, India needs 200 nuclear warheads for a minimum deterrence doctrine with no first use strategy. These would be adequate to deter India's nuclear



credible minimum deterrence' is built around a policy of 'no first use'. As a corollary, India is willing to absorb a 'first strike' and has declared its intention of inflicting massive punitive retaliation to cause unacceptable damage if attacked with nuclear weapons. Though there is some criticism,

Indian, Israeli firms agree to joint development

Tata Advanced Systems, the defense arm of Indian industrial house the Tata Group, has agreed to cooperatively develop and manufacture advanced defense products in India, including missiles, unmanned aerial vehicles, electronic warfare systems and aerospace products with Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI).

Itzhak Nissan, IAI president and chief executive, and Tata Group Chairman Ratan N. Tata signed the agreement in Tel Aviv, according to a May 13 statement.

India's UAV needs are met by a variety of UAVs from IAI. The Indian defense forces have a market of more than 200 UAVs. IAI is also involved in India's advanced cruise missile project and air defense projects.

Sources in the Tata Group said the two companies have plans to cooperate in the development of military satellites. The sources said cooperation between the two could reach revenues of \$10 billion.

Sources in the Tata Group added that the IAI-Tata tie-up could convert India into a major defense hub in this part of the world.

Lebanon army gives gunmen deadline to disarm

The Lebanese army said May 12 it will use force if necessary to disarm gunmen and restore law and order after five days of deadly fighting between opponents and supporters of the government.

"Following the events of recent days, namely in Beirut and in the mountains, army units have bolstered their deployment in zones of tension and are working to ensure security, re-establish order and ban all armed presence," a statement said.

"Army units will ban collective or individual irregularities in line with legal procedures, even if this means using force," it said. "This decision will be effective starting at 0600 (0300 GMT) on May 13."

The military urged all warring factions to cooperate with soldiers in order "to guarantee everyone's security."

Six days of fighting since May 7 have left at least 61 people dead and nearly 200 wounded in the worst sectarian unrest since the 1975-1990 civil war.

The clashes have pitted mainly Sunni supporters of the Western-backed government and militants loyal to the Shiite Hezbollah-led opposition which seized control of mostly Muslim west Beirut on May 9.

The violence erupted after the government said it would investigate a Hezbollah telephone network and reassign the airport security chief over his alleged links to the militant group.

Opposition fighters withdrew from Beirut's streets May 10 after the army acted to overturn the decisions.

The army has moved into several areas of tension, including the Druze mountains southeast of the capital after weekend firefights between the rival factions.

U.S. army tests prototype .50-Cal. gun

The U.S. Army Soldier Weapons Center at Picatinny Arsenal, N.J., has ordered three prototypes of a first-of-its-kind lightweight .50-cal. machine gun that fires with less recoil force and can be carried more easily in rough terrain than the Army's current .50-caliber weapon, service officials said.

Dubbed LW for lightweight and made by General Dynamics Armament and Technical Products (ATP), the 38-pound gun weighs less than half as much as the 82-pound M2 and incorporates a host of technologies designed to improve accuracy.

"The gun uses what is called impulse averaging, so it doesn't come to a hard stop. With an M2 today, you would have to take your eye away from the sight because it would shake," said U.S. Army Col. Carl Lipsit, program manager for soldier weapons at Picatinny. The LW .50-cal. is intended to be mounted quickly on light vehicles' Common Remote Weapons Station, a turret controlled remotely by soldiers with a joystick and video screen. The M2, a combat fixture for 70 years, will not be replaced, just added to, said Lt. Col. Mike Ascura, product manager for crew-served weapons at Picatinny.

The Army has ordered three prototypes from GD ATP for testing, which could lead to orders for thousands of the weapons.

The LW 50 has 250 pounds of recoil force, one-quarter that of the M2; has fixed head space and timing and fires 200 to 300 rounds per minute up to 2,000 meters, Army and GD ATP officials said.

The gun was recently test-fired by Special Operations Forces (SOFs).

"We conducted a 10,000-round early user assessment with SOFs at a test center in Yakima, Wash.," said Bob Cavarotto, GD ATP's senior program manager for advanced crew-served weapons.

In coming months, SOFs and Army evaluators will test the three prototype LW 50s at a GD ATP facility. The company will refine the design to incorporate lessons and customer input.

"This contract gets us started to develop a weapon design. The intent is to submit a follow-on proposal which would go in during the early quarter of next year to support government development," he said.

More prototype testing is slated for Aberdeen Proving Ground, Md., by 2010. Low-rate initial production is scheduled for 2011, Ascura said.

France to cut active overseas troops

France plans to drastically reduce the number of military personnel it deploys overseas in active theaters of war, Defense Minister Hervé Morin said May 14.

"Who thinks in 15 or 20 years to come - with the fall of the Berlin Wall, the disappearance of the Warsaw Pact and the enlargement of the European Union - that we will need 50,000 men in central Europe?" said Morin, at the end of parliamentary committee consultations on the matter.

France is committed until the end of 2008 to being in a position to deploy 50,000 plus naval and air force hardware and logistical back-up at any given moment.

Without spelling out what the new figure is likely to be, Morin said President Nicolas Sarkozy had indicated his desire to cut back sharply.

"If France is still capable of sending 30,000 or 40,000 men into theater around the Mediterranean, looking at the big picture, that would hardly turn France into a second-class military power," Morin said.

Rejecting charges that cutbacks could leave the military ill-equipped, Morin said that since the Suez Crisis of 1956, France had "never planned (to use) more than 30,000 men."

France has about 11,000 serving military personnel in areas such as Afghanistan, Lebanon or Chad.

New government proposals to lay down a military policy framework for the next 15 years are set to be published in June.

The French army is bracing itself for numbers being slashed, with France's budgetary deficit an important factor and the experience of neighbors such as Britain suggesting larger-scale cut-backs.

Morin confirmed in April the loss of 6,000 defense jobs per annum over the next six or seven years - out of a current total of 426,000 military and civilian defense ministry employees.

Estonia to upgrade field artillery

Estonia's Ministry of Defense (MoD) has launched a twin-track proposal to purchase new or secondhand field artillery for the Estonian Army's Sturtukiväegrupp, or Artillery Group.

Exploratory talks have opened with Finland, which plans to offload part of its stock of 122mm Soviet-made howitzers.

Finland has been searching for buyers for up to 36 surplus Soviet-made 122H63 122mm howitzers since mid-2007. The 122H63s were first used in East Germany and procured by Finland in the 1960s and 1970s.

"Estonia is interested in negotiating a purchase deal with Finland but the price is discounted and right for us," said Estonia's Defense Minister Jaak Laaneots.

The procurement would form part of the Sturtukiväegrupp's modernization program to upgrade equipment by replacing its stock of 105mm and 155mm FH-70 howitzers with modern self-propelled pieces.

"Our limited ability to finance major acquisitions is likely to stop us from purchasing new howitzers. Even the modern and light 105mm units are very expensive," said Laaneots.

"If we can strike a deal with Estonia, the sum will be symbolic rather than large," said a spokesman at Finland's MoD.

The Sturtukiväegrupp has a supportive military formation role within the Estonian Army. Where other units have an artillery or a mortar component, the Artillery Group is a unit dedicated to artillery and relying on other units for infantry support. The MoD is considering adding a second Artillery Group.

U.S. calls for cooperation in combating sea piracy

The U.S. called on May 14 for increased civilian and military cooperation worldwide to combat sea piracy, off the perilous coasts of Africa in particular.

Maritime forces should unite with insurance and shipping companies to make it "so hard, so difficult, and high risk for pirates to undertake their business that they stop doing it," said Adm. Gary Roughead, U.S. Chief of Naval Operations.

He was speaking on the sidelines of a conference in Copenhagen on maritime security that grouped more than 200 representatives from 60 countries, including navies, non-governmental organizations and NATO.

The two-day meeting was organized by Denmark and the U.S. to discuss ways of combating a disturbing rise in incidents of sea piracy.

"Cooperation is the key. One country can't do it alone," Roughead said, citing the example of efforts made by countries bordering the strait of Malacca.

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