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# Key strategic failures of CTG



SYED MUNIR KHASRU

**T**HE last caretaker government probably will continue to be one of the most talked about CTGs for some time to come. The CTG has had its fair share of success, the two most significant being preparation of a flawless voter list and the holding of a free and fair national election. There have been numerous write-ups on the performance of CTG both positive and negative. This article will focus on some of the key strategic failures of the CTG. It means to have an analytical look at the failure of strategy, even when the objectives may have been positive. Intention is to share insights into some of the major issues where the CTG had either poorly conceived or no strategy at all.

## Minus two without plus one

The much-talked about theory of Minus Two from the beginning had no clearly defined attainable target. If Minus Two was to be a viable theory, then the inevitable question that should have been resolved first was who would be the Plus One to fill the vacuum. The only option that briefly surfaced was Noble Laureate Professor Yunus who came and left the centre stage apparently unprepared and lacking definite strategy. Then was the floating theory of the so called "King's Party" which neither had any substance nor had any credible presence in the political scenario. The end result was desperation of CTG to revive the Plus Two as they themselves could not be the 'Plus One.' This strategic mistake proved to be costly as searching in the wilderness ultimately led to nowhere and eroded the credibility of CTG.

## Reform-anti-reform

The unleashing of "Pro-Reformists" in both the major political parties in the early days and opposition to the same by the core party loyalists led to a fluid situation. There was neither a well defined strategy to organise the reformists under some form of common platform nor was there a clearly defined objective of the reformists. Other than pronouncing some well intended thoughts on democratising the political parties and promoting good governance, there was no concrete plan of action as to who would be doing what to serve what purposes and for whom. There was a perception that the reformists were activated by non-political

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forces which did not help their cause with the grass root leaders and workers. Reformists were either sidelined from the mainstream or in worst cases, directly attacked by the loyalist supporters. With dilution of the Minus Two formula, the botched reformist agenda fizzled out.

## Anti-corruption campaign

While the anti-corruption drive had popular support, the methods to prosecute the accused were rather hurried, arbitrary, and lacking the required solid legal basis for sustenance of the cases even after the emergency would have been withdrawn. Strategy should have been to follow regular legal procedures and utilise unfettered access to information and evidence to make the proceedings air-tight and compliant. There was utter failure of recognition that this hurried stop-gap measures would have weak legal basis if challenged under prevailing laws under normal circumstances. With the country moving towards election mode, ACC started losing not only tempo but also the moral high ground with release of accused at an abnormal pace. At the end, it looked more like a game of political compromises at the expense of due diligence.

## Duality of officialisation

While officially 1/11 was labelled as an "Army backed CTG", the wide perception was that it was the army that was calling the major shots. Particularly, the Minus Two Theory, jailing of the two former PMs, high profile politicians, and businessmen were perceived as being impossible without Army's direct role. Hence, this spectre of a government within a government led to a dual-

ity of authority, no matter how much true or perceived. The CTG could have sent a single message to the people by keeping the role of the armed forces absolutely restricted to law and order. Public appearances of the Army Chief and some of the comments, no matter how benignly intended, left room for political interpretations or misinterpretations which were not helping any notion of unitary chain of command of the CTG. Particularly, administrative functionaries lost courage and drive due to the shadowy presence of an undefined authority. As time progressed, the administration became more reactive than pro-active. This explains poor ADP implementation at a time when the reverse should have been true as bureaucrats are supposed to be functioning optimally when there is least political intervention.

## It's the economy, stupid

In spite of the splendid victory in the Gulf War, when President George Bush Senior lost to Bill Clinton in 1992, the reason cited to the Republicans was "It's the Economy, Stupid" meaning, that even when there is a commander in Chief who has won a war, in people's mind nothing is more important than their economic well being. Not to pay adequate attention to possible economic effects of anti-corruption drives and reforms, was one of the biggest strategic blunders that haunted the CTG till its last day of office. Closing of godowns, freezing of accounts, and acts of intimidations unnerved the business community, no matter how ethical or unethical businessmen may have been in their conduct over the years. It was

unrealistic to expect that a business culture where greed, corruption, and poor ethics have been dominant for decades could be changed overnight through drastic measures. The needed strategic balance between sending the right signal while actively initiating confidence building measures was missing from the beginning. Neither the Finance nor the Commerce Ministry had any vision or plan to address this in coordination with the enforcers i.e. Home Ministry or the Joint Forces.

Hence investment was shrinking as businessmen became hesitant. To compound things further to the disadvantage of the CTG was the Sidr and global developments which had negative local socio-economic effects rising prices of food and energy. With ordinary people struggling to meet minimum regular expenditure, issues like anti-corruption and reforms took a back seat and the CTG was weakened further.

## Poor media and PR strategy

One of the key strategic areas where the CTG performed miserably was Media and Public Relations. Both the Information Ministry and CA's office had no well defined plans to take people into confidence on the measures they were undertaking. No mechanism was in place to pro-actively counter some of the misperceptions, misinterpretations, and poor information that were going round. A road show was organised which lacked professional acumen to make it appealing to the people. Achievements of CTG were not effectively communicated to the masses in a manner that was credible and would provoke interest.

In an age where both the print and electronic media have become powerful tools for shaping public opinion, the CTG hardly paid any importance on the need to have a well formulated Media and PR strategy. Hence many bold reform measures and praiseworthy initiatives were undervalued in absence of a well trained marketing team while the negatives got boost from the unfettered attack of the politicians who are well trained in this job. To make things worse, some of the Advisers were talking needlessly and frivolously much to the annoyance of people. If the CTG had an effective media strategy, it could have come out much better at the end and looked less vulnerable and desperate.

## Exit strategy

Desperation of CTG became much talked about under the caption, "Exit Strategy". With economy underperforming, reform weakening, anti-corruption drive losing steam, and politicians rearing to assert CTG started retreating from early 2008. More and more it started appearing defensive and gradually gave away the field to the politicians who were the actual players in the national election the CTG was firmly committed to be holding anyway. Had there been a well crafted exit strategy when the entry was made, then the CTG would not have had to sweat so much at the end. It also could have avoided spending disproportionate amount of time, energy, and resources on some misconceived pursuits.

A good strategy is developed sooner than later and not in the midway when the ball already had started rolling. By making a wrong combination of mix and match of widely divergent issues political reform, leadership, economic management, anti-corruption drive, and of course elections there was very little of scope to have an intelligent and pragmatic strategy that would have achieved both a good elections and a reformed governance structure put in place by the longest serving CTG. While the CTG may have passed on the elections test how well it did on the reform agenda only time will tell and history will judge. Strategically, the CTG could have been much smarter and savvy than what it did.

Syed Munir Khasru is a Professor at the Institute of Business Administration (IBA), University of Dhaka.