

Israel's strategic plan in the Middle East

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ISRAEL considers Iran the greatest enemy in the Middle East after Saddam Hussein was apprehended and executed with the help of the Bush administration. Iran's disapproval of the existence of Israel is also well known by several statements in public of the Iranian President.

Israel suspects that within two to five years Iran will have nuclear weapons although the UN IAEA considers Iran's manufacturing of new grade uranium is still a long way unless IAEA inspectors are expelled from Iran and Iran withdraws from the Treaty of Non-Proliferation of 1970 to which Iran is a party (Israel, India and Pakistan are not).

Israel believes that if Iran manufactures nuclear weapons, the edge that Israel has in the balance of power in the Middle East will be upset. Israel wants US to strike Iran's nuclear reactor sites militarily but the US has been reluctant under the Bush administration to give a green signal to it. Because if Iran is attacked, Iran would target the US soldiers deployed in Iraq.

Meanwhile the Obama administration gave signals that it would like to have a dialogue with Iran and it is reported that Iran agrees with it with "no conditions." In the new climate Israel will have to accept that it no longer can bully the countries in the Middle East block.

Against the background, Israel has two strategies: (a) Israel goes alone to destroy the nuclear sites in Iran as it did Iraq's site in Osirak in 1981 and (b) Israel builds strategic defense against Iran's missile attacks.

As said earlier, the first option cannot be implemented because Israel has been restrained by the Bush administration to go alone to destroy Iran's nuclear sites. Therefore Israel has gone to build its strategy for defense against Iran's missile attack.



US base in Israel

It is reported that almost unnoticed, Israel and the Bush administration had signed a deal over the summer to station an early-warning missile radar system, staffed with US military personnel, in Israel's Negev desert.

The media described the Joint Tactical Ground Station, which brings Israel

under the US protective umbrella against missile attacks, as a "parting gift" from President Bush as he prepared to leave office.

The site that is likely to become America's first permanent base on Israeli soil was apparently not easily agreed by Israeli defense officials. Aware of the country's vulnerability to missile strikes,

they have been trying to develop their own defenses so far without success against the varying threats posed by Palestinian Qassam rockets, Hezbollah's Katyushas, and Iran and Syria's more sophisticated arsenal.

In finally accepting that it has to rely on the US shield, Israel may have answered the Middle East's biggest question for its

security.

The local media reported that the early-warning station would limit Israel's freedom to attack Iran since it would be the prime target for a retaliatory strike, endangering the lives of US personnel. Or as the Haaretz newspaper noted, Israeli officials viewed the radar system "as a signal of Washington's opposition to an Israeli strike on Iran's nuclear program".

Although ostensibly, the warm relations between Israel and the US are unchanged, in reality recent events are forcing a reluctant Israel to submit to the increasingly cool embrace of Washington.

Tel Aviv has long seen itself as a military ally of the US, largely sharing and assisting in the realization of Washington's strategic objectives. But it has also prized a degree of independence, especially the right to pursue its own agenda in the Middle East.

Difference between the US and Israel on policy in the Middle East

For some time, the key point of difference between the two has been over the benefits of "stability" in the region. US planners have promoted regional calm as a way of maintaining American control over the flow of oil. In practice, this has meant keeping the Arab people and Arab nationalism in check by bolstering reliable authoritarian rulers.

In contrast, Israel has preferred instability, believing that weak and fractious neighbours can be more easily manipulated. A series of invasions of Lebanon to accentuate ethnic divisions there and the fueling of civil war in the occupied Palestinian territories have been the template for Israel's wider regional vision.

The implicit tension in the Israeli-US alliance surfaced with the ascendance of the neo-cons under President George W. Bush, who argued that Washington's agenda should be synonymous with Israel's. The US occupation and dismemberment of Iraq was the White House's application of the Israeli doctrine. The

neo-cons' partial fall from grace began with Israel's failure to crush Hezbollah in Lebanon more than two years ago. In the immediate wake of the war, there was much discussion in Israel about how such a high-profile failure might damage the country's standing in the eyes of its US sponsor.

Iran is emerging as a regional superpower supporting most obviously Hamas and Hezbollah. Israel, on the other hand, is losing ground as the radar base is revealed. It can no longer impose its own agenda or build alliances on its own terms. Its strength is becoming increasingly, and transparently, dependent on US approval.

Israel's new plan instead of two-state solution

The most immediate and tangible effects of the political environment in the Middle East will be felt by the Palestinians. Just as before, Israel needs a long-term solution to the Palestinian problem, but cannot concede on the creation of a viable Palestinian state.

Now, however, it no longer has the luxury of biding its time as it dispossesses the Palestinians. It needs to find a solution before an Iranian bomb and an evermore confident Hamas and Hezbollah force a settlement on Palestine not to its liking.

Israel is therefore engaging in a frenzy of West Bank settlement building up six times a year ago not seen since Oslo.

Its leaders are increasingly thinking of "peace" terms that, passing over the heads of the Palestinians, will be directed at their neighbours in Jordan and Egypt. An Israeli solution requires a further entrenchment of the physical and political divisions between the two "halves" of the occupied territories, with control over the Palestinian parts of the West Bank handed eventually to Jordan and Gaza to Egypt.

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Japanese investment in BD: Pros and cons

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Japanese Ambassador His Excellency Masayuki Inouye had done two notable things since December 29th elections. He arranged a telephone conversation between Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and the Japanese Prime Minister Mr. Taro Aso that should lead to positive developments in bilateral cooperation. Then in a seminar on export diversification he told his audience of businessmen that following the transition to democracy that will inspire Japanese investors, this is "very right time" to attract Japanese investment, an advice if followed professionally could have dramatic impact on Bangladesh's economic development.

My four-year long tenure in Japan as Ambassador till April 2006 exposed me to many wonderful things about the country that has practically no natural resources. Japan was devastated following the Second World War. Yet, with great leadership and dedication of her people, Japan has become the second largest economy in the world. Japan's economic prowess is also another aspect that would strike anyone with awe and wonder. Unlike other developed nations, Japan has built up huge cash reserves both in the private and public sectors. These reserves have gone to China, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Vietnam as FDI, turning these countries from economic obscurity to economic prosperity.

During a farewell lunch hosted by the head of Japan's External Trade Organization (JETRO) I was told that Japan's investments in China had become saturated and unstable due to Sino-Japanese tension and Japanese companies were seeking newer pastures for relocating part of their investments within the concept of China plus one. He said in that context Bangladesh figured in the consideration of many Japanese investors for her strategic location in the mouth of the Bay of Bengal as a bridge between South and Southeast Asia. In my discussions with Japanese business chambers during my tenure, I could sense a clear interest among many of them in looking at Bangladesh as a serious investment destination. In fact, during the visit of Prime Minister Khaleda Zia to Japan in June 2005, there was an overflow of participants at her seminar on investment opportunities in Bangladesh that was held at the Keiderenan, the apex chamber of big businesses of Japan.

Japanese investment in Bangladesh has been negligible despite interest among Japanese investors. Japan ranked a lowly tenth among investing countries in 2006 with US \$ 22.7 million in investment. During the era of elected Governments till 1/11, Bangladesh has talked a lot about the country being a great investment destination that was not matched at the delivery level. The last BNP Government had projected the Board of Investment as a

one-stop investment body that would take care of all the needs of an investor. The Japanese Ambassador at that time addressed a letter that was leaked to the press that highlighted that the BoI was just another layer in the bureaucratic red tape that made investment more difficult and cumbersome. He cited corruption and red tapism as major obstacles that were dissuading Japanese investors. In a meeting of Japan Bangladesh Committee for Commercial and Economic Cooperation (JBCEC) held in Tokyo in June 2000, political instability, red tapism and power problem were identified as the main obstacles for Japanese investment although the leader of the Japanese side at the meeting acknowledged Bangladesh's potentials. He had said: "Bangladesh's labor is cheaper from security perspective, it enjoys very good position, and it has no ethnic problem and war like Sri Lanka."

Bangladesh has never truly understood the importance of Japanese investment, definitely not in the way Malaysia has. When Mahathir Mohammad became the Prime Minister, he saw his neighbour Japan with too much cash reserves to invest. He took charge and adjusted his country's investment laws to suit the needs of Japanese investors and investment from Japan followed like water seeks its own level when obstacles are removed. Of course Malaysia simultaneously extended the infrastructure support needed for foreign investment, of which uninterrupted power supply is absolutely indispensable. At present times, it is not that just the Japanese investors in China are interested to relocate part of their Chinese investments in another destination. In Japan too, investors are looking for new investment destinations as the Japanese Ambassador has clearly hinted. When Mr. Koizumi was the Prime Minister, his favourite priority was to privatize the postal service so that the US\$ 3 trillion lying idle there could be invested. That money will also come in the market for investment. There is enough cash in Japan waiting for foreign investment opportunities despite the economic meltdown in US that has pushed Japan into recession.

At a time when foreign aid from Bangladesh's development partners is declining, FDI is the most attractive alternative. Bangladesh's huge population, added to points already noted like good human resources and geographical location are extremely favourable incentives for attracting Japanese FDI. An added incentive could be the future prospect of South Asia under SAARC and BMSTEC becoming free trading zones that would attract any FDI to Bangladesh like the pin to the magnet for then one would also be speaking of a market of nearly 2 billion people. In this context, Japan should be the number one priority country with which to pursue the country's economic diplomacy. When the chief of Toyota visited Russia under President Putin, the latter spent a

lot of time with the former to impress Toyota to set up a plant in Russia. That is the sort of wooing that would be required to bring Japanese investment to Bangladesh.

The democratic elections in Bangladesh have set the stage to bring Japanese FDI. However, there has to be major changes in mindset and infrastructure development to achieve the desired result. In an age of transparency, slogans will not get Bangladesh anywhere. It is time to make BoI the one stop investment institution by action and not words so that Japanese investors given permission for electricity, gas and telephone connections do not have to go to the utility companies for their permission as well. When all these are done so that there is no gap between what is said and what the investor receives, it will be the turn of the Prime Minister to give acquiring FDI investment from Japan the same leadership that Mahathir Mohammed gave in Malaysia when he acquired Japanese investment for his country. The Prime Minister could do so by undertaking an official visit to Japan and meeting the Japanese Prime Minister, political leaders, businessmen and investors. Bangladesh could seriously consider setting up an exclusive Japanese Economic Zone that the Prime Minister could announce during this trip. The bottom line is Japanese FDI could transform Bangladesh in a major way in the quickest possible time.

This Government has not started on the wrong foot with Japan as the last BNP Government had. The BNP Government had unilaterally cancelled the DAP 11 Agreement with Japan on assuming office that had infuriated them and relations were put on a limbo till the project was reactivated a year and half later. It was a very insensitive decision because Japan provides to Bangladesh assistance totaling around US\$ 300 million a year that is more than double of what the US provides, and additionally Japan has unquestioned FDI potentials. Bangladesh's development partners who contribute far less act as paymasters. It is "very right time" to make serious efforts to attract Japanese investment by letting Japanese businessmen and investors know that Bangladesh is willing to do its part to attract Japanese FDI. In this context, the Foreign Ministry must start the process immediately to arrange an official visit of the Prime Minister to Japan for attracting Japanese investment. Prime Minister Aso is disposed favourably towards Bangladesh and may not last long as Japanese elections are due later this year and elections may be called even earlier. To get maximum mileage in terms of furthering economic diplomacy with FDI as a major target, the visit should be arranged during Mr. Aso's watch.

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Grab the extended hand of Obama

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AMERICA needed Abraham Lincoln to get rid of slavery; they have President Obama to overhaul the breakdown of the colossus. One had accomplished the feat to sit on the imposing chair in Washington worshipped by the people; the other has just entered the Whitehouse to write a new chapter of American history. Change is inevitable.

The economy will be Obama's first priority. Unless houses and jobs are secured, the free spending Americans will be buying less.

America to hover between gaping recessions and looming depression.

Intoxicated by the success against communism without fighting a war, America seemed to ignore the triumph of reason over regimentation in the last decade of the 20th century. Instead of globalizing democracy and human rights, the muscles of the monolith took charge to drill the world towards command loyalty. That, however, was exactly the undoing. Even after 9/11, Bin Laden and his terror establishment did not earn a grade more than of a global nuisance. Hunting for him and his

tence of freedom in the Ottoman Empire during the First World War. No democracy, no human rights, no woman rights - if they occasionally overwhelmed the brute force, they would get crumbs to pacify the outburst of deprivation. A century later, at the dawn of the 21st century, democracy and human rights remain a dream in the Muslim belt. They have been struggling against the occupation of their own rulers ever since. All these have been going on mostly under the camouflage of religion. The clash of the century is not between Muslims and non-Muslims but against Muslims

call.

Abraham Lincoln realized one and a half-century ago that it was possible to deny the people for a while, but human spirit could not be defeated permanently. Obama has declared that America belongs to everybody - Christians, Muslims, Hindus, nonbelievers.

No matter caste, color or religion - all are human and equal, as much undeniable as indomitable. The faith in him of the Americans is almost unconditional and in the larger world unmatched in contemporary history. The Americans have little capacity left for another failed president; either people will adore him like Abraham Lincoln, notwithstanding controversies of his time that wiped out a generation of American youth, or he will go down condemned. The world is showing much less patience for the restoration of American leadership. Even emerging China, after losing twenty million jobs at home, realizes today that there is no alternative to American leadership.

Bangladesh should be ready to work hard in the new dawn. We should invite American entrepreneurs to open the production line for labour incentive industries in Bangladesh. Our people can produce goods and services cheaper than the cost of import for America. Cheap Bangladeshi labour force can free American labour for new technologies and innovation. We should have some exclusive American industrial zone near port facilities and drastically cut down import-export documentation and time. If raw materials are coming in and finished goods are loaded on the ships, the paper chasing should come down to overseeing only. Begging should not be the intention; that never builds the health of a nation - we work for mutual benefits. Poverty is crime; the tolerance of poverty is the biggest crime in Bangladesh. War has no law and our war against poverty should not tolerate any hindrance in its way.

America had shown the resilience that they cared for the political inheritance but the desired delivery was necessary to sustain dynastic preference. Democracy always demands efficiency and sense of purpose. America hardly produced better connection for a president than George Bush had. Nevertheless, he is as much responsible for the decline of the Bush dynasty as he is for the troubles of the USA.

Bangladesh has no problem with the blood connections if the great political families can produce dynamic leadership. No one can break the protocol that people come first, foremost and every time. If somebody breaks the basic law, the people may look for an Obama and entail him in the mission of a messiah. Even dynastic leaders must succumb to the universal prerogative of the people.

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If they are not buying, the world cannot sell. That is the hardest reality of the global economy today. This is why the world economy is sinking along with the Americans. President Bush sank \$750 billion to jack up the tumbling financial institutions; President Obama is pumping in nearly a trillion dollar in the next two years to get the economy back on its feet. There is nothing fundamentally wrong with the American economy except that the necessary check and balance did not work. Millions of houses were sold to those who had no capacity or intention of paying the bills. It was amazing to see adds like 'bad debt and bad credit record no problem with us.' The ballooning of charisma became substance; manipulation of figures became corporate culture. The giant economy was at the mercy of the wild horses. The subprime disaster was the overreach of greed that pushed

terror establishment was necessary but did it really warrant occupying Afghanistan, and then Iraq on different pretexts? Rationale had to stalk American politics to enshrine that universal values are blind towards both revenge and religion. After paying a colossal cost over the last seven years, with President Obama the people have rejected the politics of revenge and occupation. Guantanamo Bay prison is under demolition along with many other hidden prison cells and torture chambers. President Obama is the dawn of a rehabilitated faith in values for bold and decisive leadership. If he can put the corporate bosses and the war machine on hold with smart diplomacy, the world will be a better place. The message is simple and clear - there is no clash of the civilizations in the global village, and America is not the enemy of the Muslims.

Muslims lost their last pre-

and their rulers to establish their fundamental rights.

When President Obama says Muslims are on the wrong side of history, he speaks the heart of the overwhelming majority waiting for the Renaissance. He is a church going Christian; nevertheless, the greatest asset of the Muslims at this hour is that he is advocating values that the Muslims need most. They have one more chance in him to grasp the extended hand to walk out of the mess. Africa, Asia, anywhere they have to work hard for long hours and many years to establish the fundamental rights of the people. The Muslims must have a vision at the dawn of a new hope to avoid societies further relapsing into a planet of darkness. The first article of faith is that Bin Laden cannot save the Muslims, but President Obama can help. The conscious section of the society, especially the Muslim intelligentsias give the wakeup