

# BDR Carnage and the geo-political equations

SULTAN MOHAMMED ZAKARIA

THE recent carnage inside the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) headquarters shocked the whole country. Some BDR soldiers (along with some suspected outsiders) carried out a massacre by killing more than 80 people including 72 BDR top brasses (deputed from army). The grisly incident once again proved how badly we manage our national security and how easily one can penetrate through the system. The whole nation mourned and was virtually at a stand still for a few days sensing much trouble in future. However, the situation is easing now. But that left some urgent questions that need to be paid attention to immediately. Although the government has formed an inquiry committee vis-à-vis allowing the army to enquire the event by its own, will it consider some very crucial geo-political equations in fixing the event? Given the nature of Bangladesh's geographical advantages almost splitting its big neighbor, which has an intention of emerging as a global power, Bangladesh, for many years, has been capitalized by many quarters indulging many extra-territorial activities. The reason, of course, is its unique geographical location which, in any case, can induce huge trouble to its big and ambitious neighbor. Therefore, the conflict of India with other nations can easily be stretched to Bangladeshi territory. And any conflict within Bangladesh can also easily have a link with the interests of many. The BDR carnage is no exception, rather the sophistication of the execution of the plan reminds us that the incident has a much deeper root.

Since dividing up into two independent sovereign nations India and Pakistan - the Indian sub-continent has been in perpetual political chaos. The two neighbours hardly passed a stable politi-

cal time since gaining their own flags. The core issue of the conflict was the status of Kashmir which both countries claimed as their own land. The matter was even taken to the UN Security Council which had later passed a resolution (47 adopted on April 21, 1948) on the same issue. Besides, Pakistan used to blame India for its dubious role in the affairs of East Pakistan. And India also alleged Pakistan for meddling in Punjab through patronizing Khalistan movement during 1970s. These hostilities between the two have always induced them to seek more fronts of new confrontation, resulting in several wars with few gains.

China, on the other hand, has also its own dispute with India over Arunachal Pradesh and Aksai Chin that China claims as its own territory, and for that the both has already fought a bloody war in 1962. And Chinese and Indian forces also clashed in the Sikkim valley of Arunachal Pradesh in 1986-87.

On 3 May, 1998 the then Defence Minister, George Fernandes, publicly labelled China as India's number one threat alleging China for stockpiling nuclear weapons in Tibet, expanding naval activity off the Burmese coast, and conducting surveillance against India from Burma's Coco Islands. At present their bilateral relations are complicated by the issues ranging from Tibet (Xizang) to Sikkim (China continues to portray Sikkim, which was absorbed by India in 1974, as an independent country) to Kashmir. Further, India plays host to the Dalai Lama and a large number of Tibetan refugees who present an implicit threat to Chinese control of Tibet.

Bangladesh, once a part of Pakistan, has somehow been embroiled in all of these equations. It's not only for that that the country was a part of Pakistan, but also for its geographical edge which can pose

During the last tenure of BNP-Jamaat government, we were the spectator of gruesome political events. Among them, at least two were directly linked to our national security system. The notorious one was the seizure of the 10 truck-loads of deadly weapons. Many believe that the consignment was meant for the northeast India's rebel group United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), which would have a safe passage through Bangladesh with the help of the then bigwigs of BNP-Jamaat government including some top brasses of the intelligence agencies. Anthony Davis of Jane's Intelligence Review was one



of them who reported on July 6, 2005 that the shipment involved ULFA and Isak-Muivah faction of the Nationalist Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN-IM), another insurgent group of Indian northeastern part. The startling feature Mr Davis mentioned that the purchases were financed by a foreign intelligence service (India alleged it's ISI of Pakistan) seeking to destabilise India's northeast. But, as Anthony Davis pointed, following a tip-off from (probably) Indian intelligence sources, the cache was interrupted and later seized.

Another event was the Bogra

arms haul case where more than one lakh bullets and 174 kg powerful RDX explosives were recovered from Kahal, Bogra in 2003. Regarding the case, the finger was also pointed in the same direction.

The issue of financing and arming Indian rebels benefits whom does not need any further explanation. But the focal issue is that any unfavourable government is not that safe a passage of doing such dealing; the then government also captured one of the top rebels of ULFA Anup Chetia. Therefore, any unfavourable government (to that equation of

intelligence game) is not only a threat to Indian north-eastern rebel groups but also can jeopardize a long existing line of intelligence battle. Therefore, that unfavourable government in Bangladesh will become a natural target of many. Furthermore, reviving the 10 truck-loads arms hauling case at present is also an existential threat to the network that worked for more than three decades successfully. The question is - will those stakeholders allow anybody to cause that sort of damage?

The recent BDR mutiny is not a simple game. If that game worked,

it was, apparently, the present government who would be the first victim. The incident could lead to the ousting of the present government, causing more bloodshed, igniting more hatred and deepening the existing political divide between the parties. Who would take full benefit of all of these? The players who long played the game? The players who don't want to lose their edges in that battle of intelligentsia where they made Bangladesh a guinea pig and the victim of their bloody game? Probably.

The author is a researcher.

## Triumph of democracy in Pakistan

BRIG GEN (RETD) JAHANGIR KABIR, ndc, psc

With President Asif Ali Zardari bowing down to public anger, the fragile democracy in Pakistan has survived; it even promises now to grow despite the turbulence. The victory for the lawyers, judges and former PM Nawaz Sharif is decisive, but it will take time to settle the ruffled mood of the nation. Much depends on the synchronization of efforts by the judiciary, army and the political forces, in an environment of cultivated trust and responsibility. The forces threatening democracy and stability of the country are still spreading. The crisis is not between democracy and non-democracy; it is between the violent elements trying to obliterate Pakistan's existence through a civil war and the state institutions and political forces that can hold it together.

Decades ago Pakistan invited trouble by joining the international effort in Afghanistan. It is difficult to assess how much of the trouble she could avoid on her long and porous border with Afghanistan even without joining the international effort. Along with the international elements, some disgruntled religious forces from within are threatening because it has not kept its promise to become a theological state. For them Pakistan is an unfulfilled dream of an extended utopian Ummah, and the guns and bombs are to that end. Yet, for some Pakistan is the suppression of their ethnic identity. From commercial hub Karachi to picturesque capital Islamabad tension is rising. Recent attack on the Sri Lanka cricket team in Lahore shows how dangerously the situation is spiraling.

The army under General Ashfaq Parvez Kayani has many obligations to meet; yet it cannot keep away from politics, nor should it take over. The general seems to realize that another bout of martial law cannot bring any good to Pakistan, nor he is in a position to distance himself. He should let the people know that the next martial law will be very severe in case army is forced to take over. The politicians had enough of it, should know what can be in case the jackboots reenter politics. The army needs extraordinary resolve to guide politics without entering it.

Pakistan has a unique culture that mixes harsh Muslim belt with absorbing South Asian blend. Neither of the cultural trends seem to have a hold on it. In many ways, Pakistan is a melting pot of fierce central Asia, suspicious Arabs and cautious India. The military needs a very delicate balancing between careful persuasion and suppression of personal ambition. Bold and decisive leadership of General Kayani with a vision for a democratic Pakistan will make the difference.

Ever since the dismissal of the Chief Justice Iftikhar Chowdhury and many others, the judiciary has been riding on the politics of street out of compulsion. Now that the pride of the judiciary has been restored, the prejudice must not take over for vengeance against the wrong doers. Justice Iftikhar will have high stakes in saving not only democracy but nourishing it to grow. He may have to follow a blend of high ethics of judiciary with willingness to compromise to save it. Much will depend on the corrective doses within tolerance level for the fragile society. The Chief Justice and his team of judges will have to deliver mother-care-judgments on the correction path. The courts are the last resort of hope. Nevertheless, the judiciary alone is capable of delivering little; but hope must sustain. At this crucial time, the courts have a historical role to guide the infant democracy out of the mess.

Nawaz Sharif has emerged as the most popular leader of Pakistan along with PM Yousaf Raja Gilani. It is not the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) but president Zardari who lost the battle. There should be a deal between the PPP and Muslim League (Nawaz) to strengthen the democratic forces. Coalition between the political parties with public confidence will be an advantage to deal with the spreading terror. Shabaz Sharif, the most popular politician of Punjab, needs to be restored as the chief minister. With the army maneuvering from behind and the Chief Justice nodding approval, the coalition between the archivials is possible.

The controversial president Zardari should not survive the humiliation. Let Bilawal, son of late Benazir Bhutto educate and mature to hold the family tradition if he is interested and capable in the coming days: the father must go now. It is time for Zardari to go on hibernation to a place or country of his choice. The general along with the Chief Justice will work out a deal for an easy exit.

That will keep politics cool until the next general election and the army is free to concentrate on antiterrorist drive. Like the Durand Line between Pakistan and Afghanistan, the boundary between Taliban and Al Qaeda is all but gone. Under pressure from NATO and the Pakistani forces, with an appealing political dialogue, the line needs to be redrawn between Taliban and Al Qaeda hiding in the trans-frontier hideouts. It is time to negotiate with Taliban and offer them some political concessions in Afghanistan. The very start of a dialogue will make a difference in the counterterrorism operations. However can the menace be contained and quarantined is not clear. Afghanistan is treacherous for all kinds of military operation, and antiterrorist war is deceiving by nature. The military operations against spreading torrent of Al Qaeda and Taliban combined must have a vigorous political front revived.

It is difficult to understand how slaughtering hundreds of innocent people can advance a religion or cause. Such madness can only harm a cause by drawing public anger. After the Mumbai carnage on November 26, 2008, dubbed as 9/11 of India, it has reasons to be angry at Pakistan. Troubles beyond manageable limit in Pakistan will however create another Durand Line on the long Indo-Pak border. Pakistan is offering a buffer for India from the happenings in Afghanistan. If Indian cities are not safe now it can be worse with a diluted Pakistan. India has a greater strategic interest in a peaceful, democratic and modern Pakistan. The big neighbor may have to absorb some pain now for a better future. Pakistan should appreciate the patience India has shown following 11/26 and cooperate with the common enemy.

Hatred has crippled the subcontinent: it is time to build on the thread of goodwill and common interest.

Fighting the terrorist or lawbreakers is not difficult but finding them is. Antiterrorist war anywhere is of intelligence. While intelligence resources look for the needle in the haystack, the political bosses must be patient. On such thankless jobs, the politicians more often should listen to the expert briefing than ask for intelligence of their choice. Hard intelligence is hardly sweet for the rulers anywhere. Pakistan is very much in the storm, India has enough of it - exported and home-grown. Bangladesh should start a serious battle procedure to tighten her belt.

The author is a freelancer.

## US-Russia relations: A new beginning?

HARUN UR RASHID

THE US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton met Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov for the first time on 6th March following a decision on 5th March by NATO to resume relations between NATO and Russia. It broke off after the Georgia-Russia conflict in August 2008.

Political observers believe under the Obama administration, the relation between the two powers would improve because both need each other for resolution of many global and regional issues such as, counter-terrorism, Afghanistan, nuclear proliferation, Iran issue, NATO-Russia relations, energy security and climate change.

The confrontation between them leads to global instability because the UN, in particular the Security Council in charge of maintenance of international peace and security, is unable to take a united action because of the disagreement of veto-carrying members including Russia.

### Why did US relations cool so much?

Observers believe the Bush administration could not shed the Cold War mentality and wanted to pique in the "Russian eyes" at every possible opportunity. The former National Security Adviser and Secretary of State Dr. Condoleezza Rice, despite her PhD degree on Russia's communism, is believed to have a confrontational view on US-Russia relations.

In 2002, Bush angered Moscow in abrogating the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty of 1972. Washington and Moscow signed the treaty to slow down the nuclear arms race. The ABM Treaty barred both superpowers from deploying national defenses against long-range ballistic missiles and from building the foundation for such a defense.

The treaty was based on the premise that if either superpower constructed a strategic defense, the other would build up its offensive nuclear forces to offset the defense. The superpowers would therefore quickly be put on a path towards a never-ending offensive-defensive arms race as each tried to balance its counterpart's action.

While abrogating the treaty,

President George W. Bush, issued a short written statement the day the treaty expired. In it he noted that the treaty was "now behind us" and he reiterated his commitment to deploy missile defenses "as soon as possible" to protect against "growing missile threats."

Next came the expansion of NATO, contrary to an agreement between Washington and Russia that NATO's expansion would not disadvantage Moscow. After that the Bush administration proposed deployment of anti-missile defense system in Poland and the Czech Republic, to the annoyance of Russia. The deployment of missile defense base in Poland appears to be an attempt to chip away at Russia's influence in the region.



Russia is angered because Russia knows very well that the deployment of the missile defense system in these countries is meant for Russia and not for Iran's missiles. It seems that the US, with its allies, wants to encircle Russia to have a confrontational view on US-Russia relations.

Finally, the US and its allies supported Georgia in its conflict with Russia and recognized Kosovo as a new state and angered Russia. Russia in retaliatory measures recognized South Ossetia and Abkhazia, breakaway parts of Georgia as new states.

### New Beginning:

All these irritations noted above need to be ironed out. Now the broad question lies whether Washington and Moscow want to act as partners or as competitors. It is reported that President

Obama proposed the US would not proceed with missile defense shield installations in Poland and Czech Republic if Russia helps in stopping Iran developing intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM). If there were no Iranian ICBM, the argument runs, there would be no need for missile defense in Europe.

Russia has so far been reluctant to impose further sanctions on Iran for nuclear programmes. The US wants Russia not to cooperate with Iran on nuclear programme and not to sell advanced anti-aircraft missile to Iran.

On Afghanistan, the US has proposed an international conference. Hillary Clinton recently signalled that Russia and Iran would be invited to the conference

to live this part of the world.

President Obama may not want to press the membership proposal too hard, given the volatility of the region including the differences of opinion among some Nato states on the membership within Ukraine and Georgia. Both sides have an interest in further reducing their strategic nuclear stockpiles. It is estimated that the US has 6,000 operational warheads while Russia has 5,670. The deadline of the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) runs out in December. Furthermore there is talk of reducing missile warheads down towards 1,000 each and they are due by a previous agreement to a maximum of 2,200 deployed warheads by 2012. Russia not only wants deployed warheads but also stored warheads (which the US has done) to be counted and for delivery vehicles (rockets, bombers and submarines) to be reduced as well.

The Middle East issues will be subject of cooperation between them. On Palestinian-Israeli issue, Hillary Clinton has committed to a two-state solution and Russia seems to agree. But for a comprehensive peace both Syria and Iran should come on board and Russia may help in the matter. Meanwhile, the Obama administration is sending positive signals to both Syria and Iran.

The Obama administration's readiness to engage Russia is a sign of hard-headed realism. The history of diplomacy makes amply clear that longstanding rivalries usually require engagement often at the highest level to reach resolution.

After eight years of dangerous bunker mentality in Washington, Obama's plans for engaging friends and adversaries alike offers the best hope for cleaning up the woeful mess that has been left behind by the Bush administration.

Furthermore, President Obama is expected to meet President Medvedev on 2nd April in London where they will be attending the G-20 economic summit. Both the Presidents may further carry forward the bilateral talks on sidelines of the summit, commenced by US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton with the Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov.

The author is former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN, Geneva.