

# About secret pacts

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HERE are important lessons to be learnt for Bangladesh from the Japanese experience with secret deals. While the LDP was in power for over five decades, except for a brief period in 1993, there was persistent accusation from the opposition with considerable public support that Japan had entered into secret deals with USA on security. However, the LDP led government was not willing to lend credence to those accusations and perceptions without being able to prove there were no secret deals. When the LDP lost power in the elections last September to the Democratic Party of Japan, one of the first tasks of the new Foreign Minister Katsuya Okada was to instruct the Foreign Ministry for a report about the secret deals. He gave his Ministry a year to come up with its findings, acknowledging the fact that it is easy to accuse about existence of secret deals but quite another thing to prove it.

In case of Bangladesh-India relations, there had been a gap in public perception and security agreements in the past. It started soon after our independence when Bangladesh and India signed the 25-year Friendship Treaty. While the governments at the time in New Delhi and Dhaka did not see any hidden agenda in the Treaty, the public view of the Treaty was quite different. There were many in Bangladesh who thought that the Treaty was an "unequal" one and a ploy by India to keep control over the country in the context of India's security priorities. The Treaty was allowed to lapse by Bangladesh in 1997 when the Awami League was in power. In matters of security, where two countries cannot reveal everything about the agreements that they have concluded to the public, there will always be a gap between reality and perception. Where politics is immature and where there is no consensus between the party in power and the party in opposition on such issues, the gap is natural. If there is none, then that would be extremely surprising.

It is thus because of the nature of dynamics related to security agreements that the difference has arisen

between the ruling Awami League and the opposition BNP over the three security agreements that were signed during the recent visit of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to India. The opposition has accused the AL government of a "secret" deal and even went to the extent of accusing them of "selling" the country. The government has reacted to these accusations and used extremely harsh words to counteract. The Minister for LGRD who is also the government spokesman challenged the BNP to prove these accusations, particularly on the issue of the secret deal.

It is unfortunate that the BNP has brought this charge on such an important state visit of Sheikh Hasina that has potentials of being a watershed visit for furtherance of Bangladesh-India relations. But before one trashes it, it would be worthwhile to be a devil's advocate and look into why the BNP brought this accusation. More precisely, it would be useful to see if they have been given the cause for such a suspicion. The history of Bangladesh-India relation gives the BNP one reason for such a suspicion. The other important one is more recent and arises out of the events surrounding the arrest of the ULFA Chief Aravinda Rajkhowa and his associates. It happened just before Sheikh Hasina's visit. While the Indian media went gaga over the arrests, warmly expressing deep appreciation for Bangladesh's cooperation in apprehending them, Bangladesh declined any involvement in these arrests. When he was produced in the court in Gauhati, Rajkhowa expressed his anger and disappointment at Bangladesh, mentioning that the country had betrayed him. The Bangladesh government denied any involvement with the Home Minister categorical about her government's ignorance about the ULFA arrests.

Thus for good reasons, the public in Bangladesh have remained confused about what really happened although many have no doubt that the ULFA insurgents were apprehended inside Bangladesh and handed to the Indian security. The government must thus bear responsibility for causing suspicion in the public mind on the issue



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for its dealing with the ULFA arrests was clumsy and not transparent.

The three agreements related to security cooperation signed during the visit of Sheikh Hasina, coming in the wake of lack of transparency with the ULFA arrests, are good enough reasons to conclude that the two countries have decided at the highest level for deep cooperation on security matters. The security cooperation is no doubt

the correct thing to do for terrorists, wherever they are, are enemies of everybody because they kill innocent people. Such cooperation will also benefit Bangladesh by improving its image internationally after being branded as a country seething with extremist elements during the last BNP tenure. Bangladesh has recently been left out of the list of 14 countries whose nationals have been listed for

extra security checks after the US imposed new and enhanced security for aircrafts flying to the United States following the failed attempt by a Nigerian to blow a Northwest airlines aircraft just short of landing in Detroit on Christmas day.

In between the government's perfect score to itself and the opposition's zero, the visit has laid the groundwork for significant improvement of

Bangladesh-India relations. However, the key to that happening will depend on how successfully the government is able to remove the doubts that the opposition has inserted, particularly over the security agreements and the accusation of a "secret deal." The best way to do that would be for the Awami League to open dialogue with the BNP. However, given the acrimony between the two, that is impossible. The only other way that may help remove the doubts partially would be to place the agreements in Parliament for public knowledge. In fact, article 147 (A) makes it incumbent upon the government to do so. The government should use the constitutional requirement to tell the nation whether it had or did not have anything to do with the arrests of the ULFA leaders. If not, it should explain why the Indian media did not seem to have any doubts about Bangladesh's hands in the arrests. It should also present the details of the security related agreements. That could lift doubts over the visit's outcome.

The "secret deal" notwithstanding, the Prime Minister's comment about lack of Indian generosity that she had made in a speech during the visit has also created problem for the government to explain the positive outcome of the visit. The Foreign Minister recently said that Bangladesh is seeking to sign an "ad hoc" deal on Teesta water sharing because a long term deal would need hydrological data, which will be time consuming. Why could this not have happened during the visit? The Indians could also have made a positive gesture on Tipaimukh, perhaps abandoned it altogether given Bangladesh's concessions on use of the ports and commitment on the extremely important issue of security. The Indians promised 250 MW of electricity which is a commercial deal while the US \$1 billion is a credit line, not unilateral concession. One cannot help thinking of what a little bit of "Gujral Doctrine" could have done to Bangladesh-India relations as this point in time.

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# Which way Afghanistan?

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WITH 30,000 American and 7,000 NATO additional troops, it still difficult to judge which way Afghanistan is going. There is no cut and dry situation in the treacherous war that is increasingly asking for more blood and money. Americans are getting jittery because of few thousand casualties suffered since 9/11 on both fronts. No matter how sophisticated and overbearing the position is it is irrational to think of counterterrorist effort without a price tag in blood and money. Military compulsion in Afghanistan and political expediency in Washington appears on a collision course. The fallout of war on US economy and politics in the sensitive midterm election at the year end remains as unpredictable as the outcome of the surge of additional troops in Afghanistan.

Popular mandate for president Obama focused mainly on repairing the financial meltdown and reverse the failed war effort in Iraq and Afghanistan. The dilemma of the president is between his conviction about the unproductive wars and the compulsion surrounding the battlefields. It is much easier for the powerful president to engage in a conflict than disengage from it. Regime change did not justify costly venture in Iraq, especially when none of the emerging political forces except perhaps the Kurds in the northern hilly region are offering a hand of friendship to the Americans.

Meanwhile ominous sings are surfacing that should be of concern to the policy makers. A longtime agent from Jordan has betrayed the very heart of the CIA activities in Khost, southern Afghanistan, on January 1, killing 7 top operators. A psychiatrist major in the US Army murdered twelve soldiers at Fort Hood, Texas on November 5, immediately before his deployment in Iraq. In the international arena, attempt by a Nigerian to blow himself up to destroy an Northwest Airlines plane on Christmas day remind once again that frustration and anger is still spreading. Latest audio tape claims Bin Laden is still alive and threatening.

Japan Airlines, the largest Asian carrier collapsed recently, the troubled aviation industry will have to spend billions of dollars more on tighter security needs, pushing it further into trouble. Doubt and mistrust along with political compulsion are progressively handicapping US capabilities. Sporadic though, these cases are signals that demand a review of policies and strategies.

The newly elected president's first job is to get ready for his reelection. From high water mark at the begin-



ning of 2009, president Obama's popularity has taken a nosedive within the honeymoon year hovering at breakeven point now. If the midterm election at the year end does not favour the Democrats, alarm bell will start ringing on the reelection bid of the President, besides the stakes on many battleground states, Congress and the Senate in 2012.

The recession has bottomed up but yet not showing the visible recovery signs. With US unemployment rate dogging around 10 percent the economy refuses to fix average American pockets. With the kind of trillion-dollar deficit and trillions more in debt, many feel that America cannot go back to the free spending days anymore. The load of war and extraordinary effort to revitalize the corporate world is weakening and erasing the confidence on the dollar.

The loss of traditional Kennedy senate seat by the Democrats in Massachusetts may turn out to be costly for the party and the President. The Vietnam war had destroyed President Johnson's second term, Iranian hostage crisis destroyed President Carter and senior Bush lost the second term on underperforming economy immediately after winning the war in Iraq. How president Obama plays his cards under the double clutch of deceiving war and underperforming economy for his second term will be an interesting study.

Withdrawal is the most complex of the military operations; forces make lot of noise and show aggressive posture to deceive the enemy of what actually is going on. For many deployments of additional troops is nothing but a ploy by President Obama to start withdrawing from Afghanistan before

the midterm pole. Up to this point, reinforcement in Afghanistan makes sense. However, the time of withdrawal in conventional sense is 'well kept secret' until the last moment. Insurgents may not have the capability to pursue the sophisticated forces, but will offer them a purpose to hide and save their resources for the campaign after foreign troops are gone. The Taliban and al Qaeda are cunning lot, can play hide and seek for another year if Americans are going. It is difficult to dovetail both deployment and withdrawal timelines openly for the desired result.

American forces were not defeated in the battlefields of Vietnam but in Washington. The Capitol Hill is again on the grip of an unpopular war. The republicans are lucky in many ways to pass the recession and unwanted war on the back of the Democrats. While average voters are getting jittery, both the economy and war defy quick fix solution. The crisis point reached through decades of misjudgment asks for more time for corrective measures to work. Abrupt disengagement will certainly unnerve American assets in the volatile Middle East and Central Asia; may be characterised as anything between betrayals to abandonment.

Two decades ago, after the defeat of the erstwhile Soviet Union when the warlords were killing each other I said in one discussion in Pakistan that Afghanistan as a state did not exist, should be allowed a period of cooling. Ever since, it is a case study of failed strategy. Pakistan moved in with a fake hope of creating a surrogate state through Taliban that went out of its control immediately on reaching Kabul. Americans bombed out Mullah Omar's Taliban regime follow-

ing 9/11 without arranging an indigenous political force to takeover. Urgency of 9/11 demanded immediate retaliation, but bringing expatriate Karzai without political roots was another strategic mistake. Indigenous choice from among the savage warlords would have done less damage than a polished Karzai who needs GIs for his personal security and protection. Without a sense of belonging, handpicks of Karzai resort to wanton looting. Americans should have chosen one from the lesser enemies than a loyal friend who continues to be labiality.

It may not be easy to take the anger out immediately, but there must be a serious effort to take some steam off so that it does not easily reach the boiling point. Anti-extremist activities are a war of psychology, not of guns. Given a choice most soldiers would much rather walk through a minefield than fight a counterinsurgency or antiterrorist war. Should Americans decide to stay; the soldiers without uniform will ultimately decide the fate of Afghanistan.

Intelligence assets, unlike the rapid action force, are not ready on the shelf for deployment. It is a painstaking process of development, time bound and resource glut. How soon Americans will be able to draw international boundaries from Pakistan to Palestine and inject responsibility in maintaining the interstate boundaries will ultimately decide the outcome of the dirty war. If anything, they should be ready for another decade to weave fragmented threads in Afghanistan to fit in the definition of a state.

The author is the founder DG of the SSF.

## NEWS BRIEFS

### India ends Nepalese arms embargo

India has decided to end its four-year self-imposed embargo on supplying small arms to Nepal and plans to provide the country with a range of assault rifles, machine guns, pistols and revolvers in addition to bomb-detection and disposal equipment.

Official sources in New Delhi said the government's rethink following the ban enforced in February 2005 after King Gyanendra sacked Nepal's democratically elected government to provide Kathmandu with military hardware such as 7.62 mm medium machine guns, 5.56 mm assault rifles and ammunition took place in December 2009.

Indian Ministry of Defence officials declined to comment but said that New Delhi was considering requests for arms from Nepal on a case by case basis.

Other than small arms Nepalese army requirements include armoured and other multi-purpose military vehicles, 81 mm mortars and ammunition for 105 mm light field guns previously provided by India.

Military officers said the resumption of weapons sales to Nepal was prompted largely by the prospect of nuclear rivals, China and Pakistan making up Kathmandu's arms shortfall.

China and Pakistan have upgraded diplomatic, political and strategic links with Kathmandu in recent years, and Islamabad has reportedly offered it a line of credit to facilitate arms transfers. China's foreign minister visited Nepal recently, while Pakistan's ambassador to Kathmandu declared some weeks ago that Islamabad would be willing to provide military aid if requested.

Source: Janes Defence Weekly

### US prepares new Taiwan arms package despite Beijing hysteries

The US appears unwilling to stop selling arms to Taiwan despite aggressive lobbying and pressure from China. Sources in Taipei and Washington have confirmed the United States is preparing the release of US congressional notifications for new arms on hold since the Bush administration.

New notifications are expected soon, said Rupert Hammond-Chambers, president of the Washington-based US-Taiwan Business Council. These include 60 UH-60M Black Hawk utility helicopters, a submarine design study, phase two of the C4I/Link 16 "Po Sheng" program, two Osprey-class mine-hunter patrol boats, and additional Patriot PAC-3 missile defence systems.

Taiwan is facing about 1,400 short-range ballistic missiles from China and plans to deploy the new PAC-3s in the central and southern regions of Taiwan.

On submarines, Taiwan has been awaiting the release of congressional notifications since the Bush administration approved the sale of eight diesel submarines in 2001. A US government source said they most likely would be smaller than conventional diesel attack submarines currently being deployed by China and other regional navies. Taiwan does not need deep submarines due to the shallow waters of the Taiwan Strait, he said.

Taiwan has an urgent need for new utility helicopters to replace ageing UH-1H "Huey" helicopters procured during the 1980s. The requirement was highlighted during the recent Typhoon Morakot that killed more than 500 people in southern Taiwan in August.

Taiwan's Air Force also received a briefing from the US Air Force on the General Atomics MQ-1C Sky Warrior tactical UAV in 2009. The Sky Warrior is an upgraded unarmed variant of the Predator. Taiwan's Air Force has a requirement for tactical UAVs to monitor sea lanes, coastal areas, disaster areas and conduct battlefield reconnaissance.

Military-run Chungshan Institute of Science and Technology has developed a variety of UAVs, but has been unable to fulfill an Air Force requirement for an advanced, extended-range, multipurpose UAV. However, the Army is considering the procurement of CSIST's Chung Shyang.

Taiwan will have a tough time balancing new procurement costs as it implements a major streamlining and command restructuring plan. There will also be strains on the military as it begins to phase out conscription for an all-volunteer system beginning in 2011 and targeted for completion in 2015.

The problem is money, said one Taiwan defence analyst. Taiwan's legislature recently approved a \$9.2 billion defense budget, a drop from the 2009 budget of \$9.9 billion and a further drop from the 2008 budget of \$10.5 billion. Further declines are expected as the economy continues to shrink.

To complicate matters, the United States has been hesitant to release new arms as China's increasing political and economic influence in Washington expands. The noisiest complaint by China is Taiwan's request for 66 F-16C/D Block 50/52 fighters to replace aging F-5s. Since 2006, the US government has refused to accept Taiwan's letter-of-request for price and availability for new F-16s. Chinese officials have called any release of F-16s a "red line."

Taiwan's Air Force also has plans to upgrade its older F-16A/B and Indigenous Defense Fighters. The Navy has similar upgrade requirements that include refurbishing six French-built La Fayette-class frigates and two Dutch-built diesel submarines. Nien-Dzu "Andrew" Yang, deputy minister of defense for policy, has denied media reports the Navy wants to procure eight Perry-class frigates from the United States to replace eight Knox-class frigates.

Chen I-Hsin, vice president of the Foundation on Asia-Pacific Peace Studies, said Taiwan needs new US arms to discourage China from becoming too aggressive. Even as cross-strait relations improve, Taiwan still needs arms to allow Taipei to negotiate from a position of strength, he said.

Source: www.defenselinks.com