

Israeli defiance on settlements issue

America and Quartet must stand tough against Netanyahu

THE impunity with which Israel has regularly defied world opinion over the Middle East crisis is by now a truism that much of the world responds to in utter exasperation. Over the years, its encouragement of Jewish settlements on occupied Arab land has stalled any move toward a settlement. Add to that its erection of a wall designed to keep Arabs away from the settlers. Overall, the delaying tactics it has regularly adopted in the matter of arriving at a two-state solution have kept emotions alive, to a point where its own backers in the West now find themselves in a state of annoyance. And matters are not helped at all by clear Israeli complicity in the murder of a Palestinian politician in Dubai recently. The recent expulsion of an Israeli diplomat in London by the British authorities over a forgery of British passports that would camouflage the killers is a broad hint of the levels to which Israel has stooped in defence of its questionable national interest.

While it would be naïve to argue that Israel is today in a state of siege within the broad international community, it will be reasonable to suggest that a plummeting of its warmth with the United States certainly places it in a tight corner. In recent weeks, Benjamin Netanyahu's right-wing government has managed to upset just about everyone who matters in Washington. Even as American and Quartet envoys have sought to restart talks toward a resolution of the Palestine-Israel issue, Netanyahu's government has gone ahead with the job of continuing to build Jewish settlements in the annexed eastern part of Jerusalem. In the process, it has managed to anger President Obama, whose coolness toward a visiting Netanyahu in Washington was not lost on anyone. The Israelis' defiance over the settlement issue has drawn sharp criticism from Vice President Joe Biden and provoked Secretary of State Hillary Clinton into warning them that the peace process is threatened by their actions. Obviously, the Israelis have not been overly worried because of the very large degree of influence they yet wield within the Jewish lobby in the United States. A prime instance of how long a shadow Israel still casts on US politics comes through the vigour with which the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) defends Israel's actions in the Middle East.

Despite these facts, it is President Obama's firmness over the settlements policy that must be noted. Whether the US leader will eventually go soft on Israel is not clear. But if he does, he will risk putting his country to ridicule before Arab public opinion despite his professions of support for a Palestinian state. What must now be set in motion is a raft of measures aimed at compelling Israel to step back from its settlements policy in Palestine and especially in east Jerusalem. Those measures must include a sustained level of American toughness toward the Netanyahu government as well as coordinated, meaningful efforts by the Quartet to force Israel's climb-down from its present state of defiance. Any easing of the pressure will only embolden Israel in its pursuit of illegitimate expansion.

It's CCTV at DMCH now

The issue remains one of management though

SO telling have been the effects of mismanagement, corruption and malpractice on the service delivery of Dhaka Medical College Hospital that it has acquired a forbidding image, like it or not. In terms of reputation, if not specialisation in certain areas where hospitals like DMCH or SMCH still remain ordinary patients' last resort, it has lost touch with its old, glorious charm.

Supposed to be a hospital providing affordable and dependable Medicare to people of small or no means, DMCH is now held ransom to a free-for-all by colluding employees and go-between mercenaries. That the management, departmental heads, doctors and specialists are helpless before the muscle power of sheer numbers is hardly an acceptable explanation because if they were united, and united behind the good cause of their collective call to duty, they would have won the day by now.

Whether it is attention at the OPD, admission to wards, provision for diet and medicine, toilet facility, pathological tests -- everything seems to carry an extra price tag. Hospital premises and even interiors are mostly unclean, some wards in particular give off bad odour and even emergency patients are huddled along corridors in miserable conditions. The accompanying relatives allegedly even have fear for their security. Then, of course, there are attempts by middlemen to wean away gullible patients and their attendants to private clinics.

It is all very good to note that the authorities are going to install 16 closed circuit television (CCTV) cameras at all important points to keep an eye on attempted manipulation by brokers and any institutional misconduct in the making. In the ultimate analysis, it is the man behind the machine that is key to benefiting from such a snooping eye. Of course, to a certain extent, presence of the CCTV camera is supposed to keep the wicked at bay. But then the crucial test will be keeping the machines working in a place where notoriously equipment has a way of conking, especially one so consequential at that! The readings will have to be constantly watched, analysed and actions instantly taken on detection of any offence in the brew; otherwise the whole exercise will be scuppered. In fact, it may breed a degree of complacency into the management.

The health minister has himself shown a great sensitivity to the need for expanding the hospital capacity and promised addition of a new building to DMCH which we want to see come up soon enough.

For a substantive war crimes trial

What matters in the end is a judicial acknowledgement, on the part of the war crimes tribunal, that these officers of the Pakistan army along with their Bengali collaborators willfully and with little sense of shame or guilt carried out the genocide of three million Bengalis in 1971.



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THESE are galvanising times. And yet a degree of caution must be in place as we go through them, indeed as we try to fashion them to our moral and intellectual expectations. All these expectations are wrapped around the tribunal that is now finally in place for a trial of the war criminals of 1971. The central idea here is one of a dispensation of justice. It is not and has never been one of vengeance. Those who today speak of a witchhunt in the name of war crimes are carefully trying to divert the course of justice and subvert the need for ethics in politics.

Let the basics of the war crimes trial be

clearly understood by all, despite everything that the old war criminals and their sympathisers may try to put across. And the basics are simple: bringing the collaborators of the Pakistan occupation army to trial will certainly not be an effort to embarrass those political parties which have within their fold a good number of these old believers in Pakistan. As for the Jamaat-e-Islami, the process of the war crimes trial will not be a persecution of the party but a holding to account of its prominent figures guilty of venality back in 1971.

The tribunal and with it the country ought to be forewarned. Many or perhaps all of the men hauled up for trial as war criminals will in all likelihood try impress-

ing us with the thought that in 1971 they were defending the state of Pakistan as citizens of Pakistan. For these men, the war of liberation remains a 'civil war' in which 'East Pakistan' needed to be defended from the 'secessionists' who sought to destroy Pakistan in the name of Bangladesh.

It is an argument that must speedily be reduced to smithereens, for reasons that are as clear as daylight. And this is the argument the tribunal and the people of Bangladesh can put forth if these collaborators speak of their defence of Pakistan: with effect from March 26, 1971, when the independence of Bangladesh was proclaimed by Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman -- an act subsequently reinforced by Major Zia's announcement on Bangabandhu's behalf on March 27 as also by the Proclamation of Independence by the Mujibnagar government in April 1971 -- the state of Pakistan ceased to exist in these parts and the Pakistan army quickly turned into a foreign occupation force. In simple terms, the local Bengali collaborators were, after March 26, waging war against their own people in defence of a foreign state.

The tribunal, the prosecution, indeed the Bangladesh state must make note of several other significant factors as the time draws closer for the war crimes trial to commence. The most important one is the need to reopen the files against the 195 Pakistani military officers who were allowed to go home as part of a tripartite deal among Bangladesh, India and Pakistan in the early 1970s. These 195 officers were never pardoned by Bangabandhu's government and so can today be prosecuted by the state of Bangladesh. It is eminently possible that the government of Pakistan will not agree to have these officers extradited to Bangladesh for trial. Even so, the Bangladesh government can officially make an announcement relating to the trial of these 195 officers; and if they are not physically present in Dhaka, they can be tried in absentia.

What matters in the end is a judicial acknowledgement, on the part of the war crimes tribunal, that these officers of the Pakistan army along with their Bengali collaborators willfully and with little sense of shame or guilt carried out the genocide of three million Bengalis in 1971. The objective will be two-fold here: the Pakistani war criminals, now aging (with some already dead), will officially and legally be stigmatised for their criminality in 1971; and the local Bengali collaborators will of course have their comeuppance for their role in killing, in assisting the occupation army to kill, in raping women, in pillaging during the course of the nine-month war.

Those Bengalis who take the stand as war criminals will in all probability attempt to shift responsibility for their acts on the Pakistan army, which is why the files on the 195 officers should be reopened. The credibility of the trial will certainly go up a good many notches if the likes of Yahya Khan, Tikka Khan, A.A.K. Niazi and their fellow officers are also placed in the dock. The fact that many of the Pakistani officers as well as some Bengali war criminals are no more alive ought to be no reason not to try them, posthumously, for what they did in Bangladesh in 1971. The death of a war criminal can be no reason for him to escape public censure.

There is one final point. In the nine months leading up to Bangladesh's emergence in December 1971, a number of right-wing Bengali politicians, academics, journalists and others vociferously defended the Pakistan army's actions in occupied Bangladesh. They did not take part in the killing but they were complicit in helping the Yahya Khan junta implement its genocide programme in this country. These men, dead and alive, should also come into the prosecution net.

Let the wheels of justice roll.

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Pakistan and the Afghanistan endgame

LeT's operations in and around India, which often receive the most attention, are only part of a large pastiche that has taken LeT operatives and soldiers as far afield as Australia, Canada, Chechnya, China, Eritrea, Kosovo, Oman, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Spain, the United Kingdom, and even US.

ASHLEY J. TELLIS

AS the search for stability in Afghanistan intensifies, the threat of violence and a wider conflagration is growing. In an effort to secure a dominant position in Afghanistan and blunt India's rise, Pakistan has mobilised militants and terrorists on both sides of its borders.

While the Afghan Taliban fighting US and Nato forces continue to enjoy Pakistan's support, Islamabad has exchanged its previous policy of supporting anti-Indian insurgencies with that of supporting terrorist groups like Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT).

With tension persisting between the two South Asian rivals, this tactic not only increases the prospect of major war between New Delhi and Islamabad, but, given Lashkar's growing reach, could have global consequences.

The disruption of the India-Pakistan peace process, which has remained frozen since the Mumbai attack, is due principally to Pakistan's unwillingness to bring

to justice the Lashkar leadership, which has enjoyed the support of the country's powerful ISI.

After almost two decades of punting, many Pakistanis today concede that fomenting insurgencies within India has been a main component of Pakistan's national strategy. But that late admission comes long after Pakistan's military establishment moved to replace its failed strategy of encouraging insurgencies with the more lethal device of unleashing terrorism.

Since its formation in 1947, Pakistan has sought to stir up insurgencies within India. The earliest efforts in 1947-48 centred on provoking insurrections in Jammu and Kashmir in hopes that an internal rebellion would permit the seizure of this disputed state. These efforts failed miserably: through three major conflicts with India, the people of Kashmir stayed loyal to New Delhi.

After Pakistan's defeat in the 1971 war, Islamabad attempted to stoke other secessionist movements, this time not for any territorial gains but merely to avenge its humiliation. But this effort too was beaten

back by the Indian state.

Finally, in 1989, when the first genuinely Kashmiri uprising against New Delhi broke out, Islamabad quickly threw its support behind the insurgents who were led by the secular Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF). This revolt, however, was quickly overpowered by the Indian army by 1993 -- and the defeat forced the momentous change in Islamabad's strategy.

Flushed with confidence flowing from the success of the anti-Soviet jihad in Afghanistan during the 1980s, Pakistan sought to replicate in the east what it had managed in the west, namely, the defeat of a great power larger than itself.

Using the same instruments as before -- radical Islamist groups that had sprung up throughout Pakistan -- the ISI pushed into Jammu and Kashmir for the first time in 1993 with combat-hardened aliens tasked to inflict large-scale murder and mayhem.

Through this act, Pakistan's traditional strategy of fomenting insurgencies finally gave way to a new approach, namely, fomenting terrorism (an instrument that most Pakistanis still refuse to acknowledge). No longer would Pakistan rely on dissatisfied indigenous populations to advance Islamabad's interests; rather, vicious bands of Islamic terrorists, most of whom had little or no connection to any existing grievances with India, would be unleashed indiscriminately to kill large numbers of civilians.

From 1996, these attacks were deliberately extended at ISI's behest throughout India and of all the myriad terrorist organisations involved, none enjoyed greater state support than LeT. LeT has now sprung to international attention because of the bloodbath in Mumbai in November 2008, but the group has been active in South Asia since 1987, first in Afghanistan and thereafter in India.

Of all the terrorist groups ISI has sponsored over the years, LeT has been especially favoured because its dominant Punjabi composition matched the primary ethnicity of the Pakistani army and ISI; and its puritanical Salafism undergirded its willingness to engage in risky military operations throughout India.

Many in ISI are deeply sympathetic to LeT's vision of recovering "lost Muslim lands" in Asia and Europe and resurrecting a universal Islamic Caliphate through the instrument of jihad.

Although Pakistani propaganda often asserts that LeT is a Kashmiri organisation moved by the Kashmiri cause, it is nothing of the kind. The 3,000-odd foot soldiers who man its fighting ranks are drawn primarily from the Pakistani Punjab. Indian intelligence today estimates that LeT maintains some kind of presence in 21 countries worldwide with the intention of supporting or participating in what its leader Hafeez Saeed has called the perpetual "jihad against the infidels."

Consequently, LeT's operations in and around India, which often receive the most attention, are only part of a large pastiche that has taken LeT operatives and soldiers as far afield as Australia, Canada, Chechnya, China, Eritrea, Kosovo, Oman, Palestine, Saudi Arabia,

Spain, the United Kingdom, and even US.

Given the organisation's vast presence, its prolific capacity to raise funds worldwide, and its ability to conduct militant activities at great distances from its home base, LeT has become ISI's preferred instrument for its ongoing covert war with India. This includes the campaign that Pakistan is currently waging against the Indian presence in Afghanistan and against US counterinsurgency efforts in that country.

Active LeT operations in Pakistan's northwestern border areas involve close collaboration with al Qaeda, the Afghan Taliban, the Haqqani network, and Jamiat al-Dawa al-Quran wal-Sunna. Thanks to these activities and others worldwide, Washington has now reached the conclusion that LeT represents a threat to America's national interests second only to al Qaeda and in fact exceeds the latter by many measures.

Based on this judgment, Obama has told Zardari that targeting LeT would be one of his key conditions for a renewed US strategic partnership with Pakistan. Thus far, however, the Pakistani military, which still rules Pakistan even though it does not formally govern, has been non-responsive, preferring instead to emphasise the threat India supposedly poses to Pakistan while demanding further US assistance.

Such a demand is intended to inveigle US into Pakistan's relentless competition with India. The military's dismissal of Obama's injunctions regarding LeT are driven at least partly by its belief that all US warnings are little other than special pleading on the behalf of India.

Since assaulting India has become a quite satisfying end in itself, the Pakistani establishment has no incentive whatsoever to interdict this group. To the degree that ISI has attempted to control LeT, it is mainly to prevent excessive embarrassment to its sponsors or serious crises leading to war.

But outside of these aims, the Pakistani military has no interest in dismantling any terrorist assets that it believes serve it well.

Military leaders in Rawalpindi have thus not only failed to understand that American concerns about LeT derive fundamentally from its own growing conviction that the group's activities worldwide make it a direct threat to US, but they also continue to harbour the illusion that their current strategy of unleashing terrorism will enervate India, push it out of Afghanistan, and weaken US stabilisation efforts there.

Such a strategy is designed to make Islamabad the kingmaker in determining Kabul's future. This too promises to become one more in the long line of cruel illusions that has gripped Pakistan since its founding.

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Who aided and funded this man?