

Heroes beyond national frontiers



BRIG GEN MD ABDUL HAKIM AZIZ, PSC

ON 27th May 2011, nation received a text message from Armed Forces Division which reads as follows: On "International Day of UN Peacekeepers", May 29, we pay tribute to all peacekeepers and are proud to be number one in UN peacekeeping in the world AFD. It was indeed very good news for the nation to be the leader of Peacekeeping in the World competing with other professional Armed Forces. It is not the first time that we become a world leader; we have been the leader in 2005 too. Thanks to UN and AFD for remembering us and the sacrifice made by our friends and colleagues to bring peace throughout the globe. But this leadership in peacekeeping did not come in a day or two. Bangladesh Armed Forces had to sacrifice a lot to come to this state.

Bangladesh is a peace loving country and constitutionally obligated for the promotion of international peace, security and solidarity. Thus responded to international request by sending her peacekeepers in the year 1988 with the participation of 25

UNMOs (United Nations Military Observer) in Namibia to assist UNTAG (United Nations Transition Assistance Group) in Africa and 15 UNMOs in UNIIMOG (United Nations Iran-Iraq Military Observer Group) in Iraq. Bangladesh Army selected its best trained military officers to undertake this new international assignment. The works of these 40 finest officers have been carried on over the last 22 years by subsequent Peacekeepers as a result we became number one in Peacekeeping in the year 2005 and had been maintaining our position within one or two since then. Now again we have become the leader of peacekeeping in the world today. What an achievement for the country like Bangladesh whose image outside the world is a poverty stricken, overpopulated country vulnerable to cyclone, natural disasters, strikes, political turmoil, shortage of power, traffic jam and champion in corruption.

But this achievement did not come easily. We had to work very hard day and night competing with multinational officers and men who were also equally determined to take their flag above other nations at times

endangering our lives too. In the first mission in Namibia, Lt Colonel Faizul Kabir died in Road Accident, Maj Ashraf (later became colonel) lost one of his hand. My friend, Maj Alam (now Brigadier) narrowly survived and hospitalized in South Africa at level 3 hospitals along with others. Major Abul Hossain another finest brilliant Officer of Signal Corps lost his life in a minefield in Georgia. In Benin we lost 29 Peacekeepers at a time. There are many more fallen peacekeepers whose sacrifice has enriched our peace keeping history.

Over the years the Job of UN Peacekeepers have become more complex, diversified and challenging. It is no more a simple observer mission now. Mr. Kofi Annan the former Secretary General realized the complexity of modern peace keeping mission and said, "UN peacekeeping operations are now increasingly complex and multi-dimensional, going beyond monitoring a ceasefire to actually bringing failed States back to life, often after decades of conflict. The blue helmets and their civilian colleagues work together to organize elections, enact police and judicial reform, promote and protect human rights, conduct mine-clearance, advance gender equality, achieve the voluntary disarmament of former combatants, and support the return of refugees and displaced people to their homes."

Mr. Kofi Annan came to Bangladesh in March 2001 and in an address he said, "This may be my first visit to Bangladesh as Secretary-General, but Bangladesh has always loomed large in my awareness, and in that of the United Nations. Bangladeshis are among the world's most willing and able peacekeepers. The United Nations-Bangladesh partnership is strong, ready for the challenges of a new century."

Most modern peacekeeping missions are conducted under chapter VII and thus degree of risk and sacrifice is also more in such mission. Highlighting the sacrifice of Peace keepers UN Secretary General Mr. Ban Ki-moon said, "Today, we have more than 110,000 men and women deployed in conflict zones around the world. They come

from nearly 120 countries -- an all-time high, reflecting confidence in United Nations peacekeeping. They come from nations large and small, rich and poor -- some of the countries recently afflicted by war themselves. They bring different cultures and experiences to the job, but they are united in their determination to foster peace. Some are in uniform, but many are civilians and their activities go far beyond monitoring." Mr. Ban Ki-moon's words testify what we do in UN mission.

Over the years our officers have provided leadership in the United Nations Peace Keeping Operations composed of multinational soldiers. It started with the service of our officers in UNIIMOG and UNTAG. Lt Col (now Maj Gen ret'd) Fazley Elahi Akbar along with him 14 other officers have been able to create the first impression of Bangladeshi Officers for the first time in UN Mission. They were followed by another group of officers headed by Lieutenant Colonel (later became Brigadier and died) Shabab Ashfaque. He played very active role and had been able to convince the decision makers and thus created the opportunity for Bangladesh to lead the multinational forces. When Chief Military Observer (CMO) Brig Gen V M Patil of India left Iraq after completion of his tenure of duties, Brig Gen Shahedul Anam Khan, came as a CMO (Chief Military Observer) in UNIIMOG (United Nations Iraq-Iran Observer Group). He was the first ever Bangladeshi Officer to be appointed in such a prestigious appointment at that time.

Followed by Observer mission in Iraq and Namibia, the opportunity came for Bangladesh to send troops to UN mission in Cambodia. Minor Tigers (3 East Bengal Regiment) a war veteran of 1971 was selected to serve in UN mission under the leadership of Lieutenant Colonel (Now Brig Gen ret'd) Kamaluzzaman. It was a great testing ground for Bangladeshi Officer for UN higher leadership. Lieutenant Colonel Kamal did not fail the test. It was a new mission in Cambodia and Bangladesh Battalion was deployed in

a most disturbed region where the Khmer Rouge guerillas were dominating. Bangladesh being new in such type of mission was not prepared to support such mission logistically. No system was developed at that moment. As such troops did not get pay for months. It was a daunting task for the Commanding Officer to lead the Battalion overseas. But Colonel Kamaluzzaman was a cool headed dynamic personality. Assisted by his Operation Officer Major (now colonel ret'd) Ahmed Ullah Imam Khan, he formulated his concept of operation based on our experience of serving in counter-insurgency operation in Chittagong Hill Tracts. It gave them dividend to bring control of the Khmer Rouge dominated territory. He and his men taught the villagers preparing field toilets, water purification system, preparations of oral saline, use of anti-snake bite kit; conducted anti-malarial campaign, treated number of sick and wounds from own resources. Even at times troops shared their food with the poor Cambodians. It worked miracle and changed the attitude of locals and guerillas towards peacekeepers. UN learned from Bangladesh and gave name to these humanitarian operations as CIMIC (Civil Military Cooperation).

Today, I would like to salute them and others who have served and still serving for their invaluable contribution and making us proud for becoming number one in UN Peace Keeping Operations and recall the words of Hubert Humphrey by saying "The heroes of the world community are not those who withdraw when difficulties ensue, not those who can envision neither the prospect of success nor the consequence of failure -- but those who stand the heat of battle, the fight for world peace through the United Nations."

The Officers and men who made us proud are our true heroes beyond national frontiers.

The writer served as a UN military observer in Iraq in 1989-1990 and Contingent Commander in Ivory Coast in 2005-2006.

Russia, Iran, and the Reset

MARK N. KATZ

IN addition to improving cooperation on other issues, one of the goals of the Obama Administration's effort to "reset" Russian-American relations was to obtain greater help from Moscow with regard to the Iranian nuclear issue. In 2010, it appeared that this policy was highly successful. In June 2010, Russia joined with the US and most other members of the UN Security Council in imposing increased sanctions on Iran for its continued non-cooperation on the nuclear issue. And in September 2010, Russian President Medvedev announced that Moscow would not be shipping the S-300 air defense missile systems to Tehran that it had earlier agreed to do. So far in 2011, though, Moscow has been backpedaling on Iran. President Medvedev has reverted to the earlier Russian line that there is no proof that Tehran seeks to acquire nuclear weapons. Foreign Minister Lavrov has made clear -- repeatedly -- that Moscow not only does not support further sanctions against Iran, but thinks that the time has come to ease them.

What could explain this change in Russian behavior? Two developments in particular may have contributed to this. The first was the 2010 Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (known as "New START"). For Moscow, the New START treaty was an especially high priority. With Russia not modernizing its nuclear weapons arsenal at the same rate that America has been doing, Moscow was desperate to get the US to agree to the limits imposed by New START since it would be difficult for Moscow to match the American strategic nuclear arsenal if Washington did not. But while Presidents Obama and Medvedev signed this treaty on April 8, 2010, the US Senate's ratification of it was very much in doubt due to Republican concerns about Russia. Russian cooperation with the US on imposing additional UNSC sanctions against Iran in June and Moscow announcing in September that it would not ship S-300s to Tehran may well have been motivated to some degree by a Russian desire to allay these Republican concerns. But once the Senate ratified New START on December 22, 2010, Moscow's incentive to appease the Republican minority there declined -- at least for now.

The second factor has been the democratic uprisings that have shaken the Middle East since the start of 2011. Moscow did not seem to be perturbed by the Jasmine Revolution in Tunisia in January. Nor did it seem unduly upset by the

overthrow of Egypt's Mubarak in February. But when serious opposition to the regime of Muammar Qaddafi arose in Libya, Putin and Medvedev expressed opposition to the democratic uprisings throughout the Middle East. Indeed, Medvedev implied that these uprisings were instigated with the purpose of fostering a similar phenomenon in Russia as well as to break Russia up. Democratic uprisings have also occurred -- to a greater or lesser extent -- in Iran and several other Middle Eastern countries (including Yemen, Oman, and Bahrain). In mid-2009, when the Green Movement burst forth in Iran to protest the widely disbelieved announce-

ment that Mahmoud Ahmadinejad had won reelection as president on the first ballot by an overwhelming majority, Moscow immediately congratulated Ahmadinejad on being elected to a second term. Moscow had no desire to see a democratic revolution succeed in Iran then -- or now.

What accounts for Moscow's more sanguine view of democratic revolution in Tunisia and Egypt but opposition to it in Libya and Iran? This may be due to how Moscow views the differing geopolitical impacts on Russia of change in these countries. The authoritarian regimes that were ousted in Tunisia and Egypt had been closely allied to the US. If the new governments in these countries remain closely allied to the US, there will be no geopolitical change. But if they move away from it, there may be an opportunity for Russia to gain some

influence -- or at least some more business -- in them. Libya, though, is a different story. While Qaddafi's relations with the US have improved since 2003, Russia has had much better relations with him than Washington has. A democratic revolution in Libya, then, threatens to increase American and decrease Russian influence in Libya. Russian analysts have long worried that an Iranian-American rapprochement could result not only in Western firms crowding out Russian ones in Iran, but Washington working with Tehran to provide an alternative to Russia as an export route for Caspian Basin oil and gas. A democratic revolution in Iran, then, could have -- in Moscow's view -- profoundly negative geopolitical consequences for Russia and positive ones for America. This being the case, it is not surprising that the Putin/Medvedev leadership wants to strengthen the Khamenei/Ahmadinejad regime in Iran, and not weaken it through imposing additional sanctions -- especially since Moscow views these democratic uprisings as being inspired, or even orchestrated, by Washington.

We cannot, of course, be completely positive that the US Senate's December 2010 ratification of New START as well as the 2011 democratic uprisings in the Muslim Middle East are what caused the Kremlin to back off from its previous support for the Obama Administration's policy toward Iran over the nuclear issue. Nor does Moscow's backing off from supporting the Obama Administration on the Iranian nuclear issue in 2011 mean that it won't be more supportive in future. The New START experience suggests that if Senate ratification is needed for something else that Moscow values, it might become more supportive once again.

Further, if the democratic uprisings are crushed, spread no further, or bypass Iran, Moscow may once again become more comfortable with joining Washington in pressing Tehran on the nuclear issue.

But whatever the explanation for Moscow backtracking on its support for sanctions against Iran, one thing is clear: the Kremlin was not persuaded by American and European arguments about the urgency of the Iranian nuclear issue or of any necessity to continue imposing sanctions against Tehran in order to deal with it. In terms of the Iranian nuclear issue, the Obama Administration's hopes for the reset have not been realized -- nor are they likely to be so.

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Russia protests arrival of US Navy cruiser in Black Sea

RUSSIA on Sunday protested the arrival of a US Navy cruiser equipped with a ballistic missile defence system in the Black Sea to take part in naval exercises with neighbouring Ukraine, saying it was a threat to its national security.

"We have a number of questions regarding the arrival in the Black Sea of the US Navy cruiser Monterey equipped with the Aegis anti-missile system to participate in the Ukrainian-US Sea Breeze 2011 exercises," the Russian foreign ministry said. "The Russian side has repeatedly stressed that we will not let pass unnoticed the appearance of elements of US strategic infrastructure in the immediate proximity to our borders and will see such steps as a threat to our security," it said in a statement.

The protest comes as Russia and the West failed this week to reach a breakthrough on a missile shield project for Europe with Moscow complaining that its demands were falling on deaf ears. In 2009, US President Barack Obama said he would shelve his predecessor's plans to site parts of a missile defence shield in Poland and the Czech Republic, and instead deploy more mobile equipment targeting Iran's short and medium-range missiles.

The foreign ministry noted it understood that the stationing of the Monterey in European waters was part of the US missile defence shield plan but added it did not see why the warship had to be so close to its borders. "According to an official US version, they [warships] can be deployed to the Black Sea in case of necessity, for example, in case of a flare-up in the region," the statement said...



Global Strike Command tests nuclear readiness

ARMEN with Global Strike Command recently completed the first command-wide nuclear operational readiness exercise, called Constant Vigilance, without taking a break from scheduled wing-level activities, exercises and training. "This operation energized every part of the command," said Maj. Scott Ryan, the deputy chief for the Air Force Exercise Operations branch at Global Strike Command headquarters. "It allowed our units to train like they fight." "Not stopping day-to-day ops allows our units more time to train," Major Ryan said. "By taking this challenge on, wings completed unit-level exercise requirements while conducting the command-wide nuclear operational readiness exercise."

"Nuclear operational readiness exercises provide unit commanders the opportunity to demonstrate and assess their nuclear combat capability," said Robert Thomson, the chief of the exercises division at Global Strike Command headquarters.

Running the exercise while continuing regular operations across the command in April also let the wings continue to keep their scheduled flying operations on track, he said. Beyond practicing nuclear operations, the command's intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance directorate also developed force protection scenarios, or "danger scenarios," to challenge wing response levels and actions, he said...

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