

# Hillary Clinton's visit: NRB musings

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ON her recent visit to Bangladesh the US Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, urged all political actors to come together, engage in constructive dialogue, strengthen the roots of democracy, and build Bangladesh into a prosperous nation. She also commented on the state of law and order in the country that "any violence, disappearance or repression on civil society and press is contrary to democracy and rule of law." And she expressed satisfaction regarding the Bangladesh-US security dialogue, noting the importance of bilateral defense cooperation to advance peace and stability in the region.

Mrs. Clinton's words were largely consonant with the wishes and aspirations of a great majority of the citizens of Bangladesh, as well as the NRBs across the world. Similar words have resonated in the country over years, if not decades, from people of various walks of life and plentifully in the media. For example, in 2000, Rehman Sobhan wrote in the Journal of Bangladesh Studies: "It was at this stage, with elections imminent and the threats by the opposition to boycott these elections, that voices were raised around the country for some effort to try and bridge the gulf between the government and opposition. It was felt that a last attempt be made to mediate an agreement for bringing all parties together to work out a formula which would permit for a free and fair election."

Similarly, Bangladesh Development Initiative (BDI), a policy advocacy group of NRBs in the United States, organised a conference at Harvard in 2008 and articulated a six-point policy framework for sustainable economic growth and social progress in the country. In this vision it was stated that "the people of Bangladesh have also been historically deprived of democratic values and practices that have been replaced by despotic and dictatorial regimes. Re-establishment of democratic values must become a priority of the present government from the party, to the community and to the national levels."

Perhaps the powers-that-be will finally listen to the oft-repeated need to transcend animosities, foster cooperation, and enable Bangladesh to grow unencum-

bered. And if there is a perceptible change in their attitudes and behaviours, some credit must certainly be ascribed to the secretary of state and the significant influence of the United States that accompanies her.

The visit of the US secretary of state, however, raises the question: What was it all about? Largely, her diplomatic words lacked vigour and conviction in articulating a stronger relationship between the two nations. Indeed, the visit seemed mostly a missed opportunity to craft deeper ties and win the hearts of the people of the seventh largest nation on earth. Perhaps whirlwind visits are not conducive for substantive outcomes.

For example, the bilateral defense cooperation agreement between Bangladesh and USA that Mrs. Clinton mentioned is of greater importance to the United States from a global strategic perspective, especially because of its implications for the containment of rising powers in the Asian region.

How Bangladesh gains from the agreement needs greater clarification.

The secretary also met with the forerunners of microfinance. While the meeting seemed to reflect a very narrow interest, and may have even had a not-so-hidden message for the government of Bangladesh, alluding specifically to the achievements of the Grameen Bank, the secretary provided some assurance in the meeting about looking into providing duty free access to Bangladesh garment exports, a subject that the prime minister of Bangladesh had brought up earlier.

It is instructive to note that Bangladesh reportedly paid \$652 million in duties to the US treasury last year on exports of \$4.27 billion, an amount that rivals the foreign aid received from the US. In comparison, the United Kingdom paid duties of only \$351 million on exports to America worth about \$50 billion. Inequities such as these could have been cleared up during such an auspicious visit.

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Further, many would have liked to see greater US effort to build a solid partnership with Bangladesh, albeit with mutual benefit in mind. For one, an important visit such as this could have been complemented with the accompaniment a team of potential investors, however exploratory their presence, to signal positive intent. Such effort could have resulted in creating a more exciting atmosphere for investments in the country and deepening mutual respect in the relationship.

Bangladeshis would have also liked to see greater commitment of the US to join Bangladesh's fight against poverty by addressing the growing disparity between the haves and the have-nots. Measures such as advancing education and healthcare to empower the downtrodden to overcome the inequities would earn Mrs. Clinton much kudos.

In fact, if such disparities continue to grow, its ramifications are ominous. A proactive policy to help Bangladesh reduce inequality and poverty is very much in the interest of the United States as it is likely to curb the growth of adverse dynamics such as militancy that can heighten insecurity not just within but also across nations.

There is also a general feeling within Bangladesh, as in other Muslim-majority nations, that the United States harbours anti-Muslim sentiments, especially within policy circles. This is reinforced by the US military presence in Afghanistan and other Muslim-majority nations, especially its use of hard power that results in killing and maiming of innocent civilians. Such incidents are reported frequently in the international media and deflate a sense of positive ambience towards the US that requires little elaboration. Here was an opportunity for Mrs. Clinton to stress that the war on terror is not a war on Islam.

And while the security threat faced by the US is real and substantive, generating a need to adopt strong proactive measures, there is also a serious need to

engage in constructive dialogue on this matter, especially about its origins, causes, and possible amelioration strategies. Sweeping this particular issue under the rug is not healthy and the US, as the country leading the war on terror, must pursue every opportunity to engage in constructive dialogue to show clear intent that it would rather divert its immense resources to more productive endeavours instead of wasting them in a drawn-out and draining state of conflict. A statement to this effect by the secretary of state would gain significant mileage.

Bangladesh also needs to develop its human resource base, infrastructure, energy self-sufficiency, and food reserves for the unpredictable effects of climate change. There were no reassuring words from the secretary of state on cooperation in such matters of vital interest to Bangladesh.

Finally, in a globally connected world, people are aware of the travails of the United States, especially the political rancour and impasse that often hold up economic and social progress in that country. An election year can be especially revealing about the country's raw spots. Thus, when the secretary of state alighted on Bangladeshi soil and reminded its leaders about their intransigence in addressing the country's problems through cooperation, alluding to similar issues and difficulties in her own country may have made her statements more palatable and diplomatically more astute and persuasive.

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## Irina Bokova's first visit to Dhaka

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FIRST of all, I welcome Ms. Irina Bokova, the first woman Director-General of Unesco, also the former foreign minister of Bulgaria, on her first visit to Dhaka. The visit is linked with the three-day meet of cultural diversity ministerial forum, which begins on May 9, and conferring of "Doctor of Laws" by Dhaka University. Delegates from 30 Asia-Pacific countries will participate in the cultural diversity programme. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is scheduled to inaugurate it at the Bangabandhu International Conference Centre and Irina Bokova will attend the ceremony as guest of honour.

Bangladesh and Unesco have jointly organised the programme. International Fund for Cultural Diversity (IFCD) of Unesco and Bangladesh government are funding it. There will be a joint statement titled, "Dhaka Declaration," on the concluding day, with a special call for strengthening cultural cooperation in the perspective of sustainable development in the region.

Irina Bokova took over the rein of Unesco as Director General from Mr. Koichuru Matsuura in 2009. In her words: "My accession to this high office gives confidence to all women wherever they may be. It is a signal that they must have access to knowledge and power so that they may bring their contribution to society and take part in running world affairs." She stated her intention to spread the message that gender equality was indispensable for development. She said: "Globalisation calls for watchfulness because, while it liberates and helps millions get out of poverty and destitution, it also risks reducing our world of rich diversity into uniformity." She spoke of her intention to promote "new humanism." "For me, humanism means aspiring to peace, democracy, justice and human rights. For me, humanism means aspiring to tolerance, knowledge and cultural diversity," she said.

During my last visit to Unesco head office in 2011 I met Mr. Tang Qian, Assistant Director General in-charge of Education in the absence of Irina Bokova. I submitted a few written proposals which included curriculum revision and development along with teachers' training. My submission was that Unesco can provide technical support in the areas of curriculum revision, curriculum dissemination, text book development. It is usual to revise the teachers training curriculum when the national curriculum is revised. Technical support of Unesco is possible in this area. It may be mentioned here that the prime objective of our national curriculum is to ensure quality education

of our children to international standard.

For improving the quality of teaching-learning situation in the classroom we need to strengthen the professional capacity of teachers through pre-service and in-service training. We are to identify national teacher competency, reform training materials and redesign training programmes. In fact, we need to develop a comprehensive teacher training policy for all categories of teachers in line with the National Education Policy 2010. The government has already initiated this process. Unesco can provide professionals and expertise in this area also, like its support to other countries in this field.

As per recommendations of the new Education Policy 2010, the Bangladesh government recently introduced pre-primary education formally in primary schools. For developing child-friendly, attractive learning materials and teacher-friendly training materials, the support of international experts through Unesco can be very useful. On the issues related to service training of teachers: exchange of teachers/expert for specialised institutions like NAEM, National Academy for Primary Education (NAPE), HSTTI, IER, Dhaka University, National University, and NCTB can render positive contributions. The support from Unesco in developing the research and evaluation capacities of these organisations can help immediately.

In our country we do not have the means to provide this to our secondary and higher secondary teachers. In primary

education, such opportunities exist at the sub-district level (upzilla). For secondary and higher education it is very much a local necessity. Training centres there can not only conduct training programmes, but will also be in a position to conduct local training and develop training materials suitable for the teachers of the locality. These may be treated as resource centres equipped with labs, library, ICT facilities. There may be some facilities for the local community to use the centre for interaction with teachers. Unesco can render technical support in designing and setting up these centres considering the local need.

I am convinced that the Unesco will be run properly under her able leadership. I draw the attention of Ms. Irina Bokova to the development of quality education along with facilitating the expansion of science education, preservation of our rich heritage and the on-going programmes for empowerment of women in Bangladesh. I wish her all the best and hope her Dhaka visit will be a memorable one.

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## Stop trying to fix Afghanistan

ERIC GREITENS

OSAMA bin Laden's death a year ago, at the hands of a Navy SEAL team, revealed that America has been fighting two wars in Afghanistan. One is against al-Qaeda, and is clearly in America's national interest; the other war, to fix Afghanistan, is much more questionable. We must take lessons from the way we fight terrorism in Somalia, Yemen and elsewhere: Focus more on finishing the fight against al-Qaeda, and less on bringing good government to a failing state.

After 9/11, American special operations and intelligence personnel killed and captured al-Qaeda leaders, eliminated its bases of operation, restricted its financing, and disrupted its ability to launch international attacks. Relentless pressure has kept al-Qaeda's ability to conduct attacks low.

But in Afghanistan, it's hard to see whether American efforts are succeeding, and what we should do next. On 9/11 we were not attacked by a country. Yet because many Qaeda fighters were based and sheltered in Afghanistan in 2001, some Americans argued that to make victory permanent we had to not just oust the Taliban government, but also build a democracy, a modern economy and an effective national security apparatus for Afghanistan. It was like arguing that to put out a forest fire, we had to pave the forest.

Today, despite years of investment, the Taliban, associated fighters, criminal families and warlords still resist control from Kabul. President Hamid Karzai has been, at best, an unpredictable ally. Transparency International ranks Afghanistan as more corrupt than any country except Somalia and North Korea. Government security forces still cannot coordinate intelligence and operations across the country without our support.

Since bin Laden's death, many Americans have decided that our job in Afghanistan is done. They see a victory in the counterterrorism campaign, and are tired of the corruption, confusion and dysfunction of the nation-building campaign.

But it would be a mistake to abandon the country entirely, and fortunately, leaving altogether is not the only alternative. America has learned to fight al-Qaeda in other failed and failing states -- Yemen, Somalia and Pakistan -- without completely rebuilding them. It's time to bring those lessons learned back to where we started.

The weakness of the Karzai government need not pose any more of a threat to America than the ungovernability of large areas of Yemen and Somalia does. These areas must be watched closely by intelligence resources and cooperative tribal leaders, and any new threat must be cut down quickly. But that essential mission can be carried out by intelligence and Special Operations personnel who can smother remnants of al-Qaeda without having to rebuild every country where it sets up shop.

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As the Obama administration negotiates with the Karzai government and with Pakistan, we may be tempted to make commitments that, in the name of nation-building, restrict our ability to fight terrorists. If we must involve the Afghan government in every night raid, our operations will slow and targets will escape. If Pakistani officials must know in advance of every drone attack, intelligence will leak.

Rather than asking how to support the Karzai government, we should be asking how, given the realities of Afghanistan, we can most effectively disrupt al-Qaeda operations and kill al-Qaeda leaders. An effective strategy should be built around eight principles:

- Maintain America's ability to strike al-Qaeda with surprise, speed and violence. Don't compromise it for the sake of a relationship with an unreliable ally;
- Focus on the mission, not the number of troops. Embedding Special Operations and intelligence personnel throughout the country will reduce our footprint without sacrificing our ability to hit al-Qaeda;
- Put in place a long-term plan for maintaining effective signals and human intelligence. Intelligence is easily overlooked in talk about "boots on the ground," but is our first line of defense;
- Make clear that our support for Afghanistan's army and national police force depends on their ability to counter international terrorist attacks. Our continued investment must be dependent on their performance;
- If the Karzai government can't get the job done, work with people who can. Local allies like tribal leaders can be partners. Our time should be spent working directly with them, rather than trying to get them to partner with Kabul;
- Expand our options by strengthening relationships with nearby governments, while ensuring that our plans for naval deployments maintain effective cruise missile and aircraft carrier strike capabilities;
- Be true to our friends. See that Afghans who have taken risks serving with American forces -- translators, for example -- are cared for, along with their families;
- Remember what constitutes success. Success means eliminating al-Qaeda's ability to launch terrorist attacks against the United States and our allies.

Achieving that goal demands focus. Defeating a terrorist organisation is like fighting a forest fire; there's never a clear moment of victory, and even after you've won, you have to watch carefully. The successes of the past decade have required discipline, focus and sacrifice from America's service members and their families. Now, to complete that mission, we must ask no less of our policy makers.

The writer, a former Navy SEAL, is the author of *The Heart and The Fist: The Education of a Humanitarian, the Making of a Navy SEAL*. ©New York Times. Distributed by the New York Times Syndicate.