

G20 Summit ends divided over Syria

MAHMOOD HASAN

THE eighth G20 summit, which has the mandate to address world economic issues, turned out to be a bitterly divided political meeting discussing the fate of Syria.

Leaders of 19 rich countries and the European Union met in St. Petersburg from September 5-6. Russia hosted the summit for the first time, since it was formed in 1999. The summit came in the wake of US threats of military action on Syria, after Israeli intelligence revealed that Syrian government had used chemical weapons last month on civilians near Damascus, killing more than 1300 people.

G20 countries account for 90% of global GDP, 80% of international global-trade and two-third of world population. The objectives of the group are: to achieve global economic stability through sustainable growth; promoting financial regulations that prevent financial crisis and modernise international financial architecture. The Presidency of the group rotates annually among the members. President Vladimir Putin will hold G20 Presidency until November 2014, when the ninth summit is held in Brisbane, Australia.

The two-day meeting ended with a Declaration dwelling on economic issues that face the rich and the developing nations. The leaders emphasised that global economic recovery was too weak and could slow down. Some emerging markets showed worrying signs of weakness. President Putin warned that the "risks are still very, very large" for the fragile recovery. The 114-paragraph Declaration divided into 8 sections highlighted tax avoidance, quality jobs for growth, enhancing multilateral trade, need to enhance investment, cut down budget deficits, pursuing the fight against climate change, and intensifying the fight against corruption. Summit documents are actually produced by officials in series of meetings held before the summit.

Official sessions of the summit discussed the agenda dealing with economic issues, though all the leaders were preoccupied with the question of Syria using chemical weapons against its people.

Having failed to get a British resolution approved by the UN Security Council, President Obama on 31 August stated in Washington that he had decided to launch an attack on Syria. Obama has asked for Congressional approval. President Putin, a staunch ally of President Bashar Al Assad, is stiffly opposed to any military action against Syria without the sanction of the United Nations. Syria consistently

denied any use of chemical weapons. Russia said that it would support UN action if it was proved beyond doubt that Syria indeed used chemical weapons. The issue has triggered bitter debates in US.

The diametrically opposed position of Washington and Moscow has caused worries around the world and thus Syria, the non-agenda item, became top priority for discussion among the summit leaders. The issue -- whether US should launch an attack on Syria -- was discussed at the 4-hour long



official dinner on September 5, without any consensus emerging.

President Obama also had sideline meetings with other leaders trying to persuade them to support US action on Syria. France, Canada, Turkey and Saudi Arabia apparently supported President Obama. Britain could not go along with Obama after the British parliament defeated David Cameron's motion for military action. Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany wanted UN approval for any action on Syria, cautious because she faces federal elections on September 22.

Despite tensions, Obama met with Putin on the sidelines of the summit, but neither could change the mind of the other. To recall that a Putin-Obama bilateral summit was scheduled for September 4 in Moscow, but that was cancelled by Washington after Russia granted asylum to Edward Snowden, the American who leaked NSA secrets to the media.

China backs Russia and has vetoed the British resolution. China also warned that action against Syria would drive up oil prices and slow down economic growth. President Obama's meeting with President Xi Jinping touched briefly the Syrian issue.

The Summit was an opportunity for President Obama to personally talk to all the UNSC P-5 leaders at the highest level. The President failed to carry the P-

5 and other leaders who were attending the meeting. Clearly, majority of the summit leaders, worried that war in Middle East will have grave consequences on world economy, were against Obama's position.

One wonders why Obama wants to attack Syria. He has neither UNSC sanction nor the approval from the Congress yet. Congress is not aware of the goals of the military action -- regime change or "punish" Assad, or install al-Qaeda rebels in power in Damascus. Indications are that Congress may not give Obama the go ahead. Americans are worried that an attack on Syria will lead to wider conflagration in the region involving Iran and Israel, requiring US soldiers on the ground. Opinion polls show that people in America, weary of wars, are vehemently opposed to a new war. The UN weapons inspectors have not yet submitted their report on alleged Syrian atrocities. Obama Administration said it had all the proof, but so far, has not yet revealed the evidence. Sadly, President Obama is divorced from US public opinion.

There is a nagging feeling that Israel may have manipulated the chemical weapons story and wants US intervention in Syria. That could eventually be directed against Iran, Israel's arch enemy.

For President Obama, it appears to be a moral issue. After having laid down the famous "red line", against use of chemical weapons -- he cannot "do nothing" now. Obama apparently, wants to cleanse his conscience by taking some military action against Syria.

The Geneva Protocol (1925) bans the use of Chemical Weapons, but does not ask for military action against nations using them. It would be a legal matter if a nation violates the Protocol, and only the United Nations can take appropriate action against errant nations, not any particular country.

The Summit ended firmly divided over what to do with Syria. There is no mention of Syria in the Final Documents of the Summit.

After winding up George Bush's messy war in Iraq, setting a date for withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan and pulling out the US economy from depression -- Nobel Peace Laureate Obama has put his credibility on the line unnecessarily. Obama will do good to shun prejudice and chauvinism and look for a negotiated settlement of the Syrian crisis.

Normally, for US presidents the second term at the White House is a period for foreign policy accomplishments. After this messy Syrian episode the next three years will no doubt define Obama's Presidency.

The writer is former Ambassador and Secretary.

'Online Jihad': Emerging threats

SHAMSUDDOZA SAJEN

THE last video that Osama bin Laden issued before his death was simultaneously uploaded onto five sites. Counterterrorism groups rushed to take them down, but within one hour, the video had been captured and copied to more than 600 sites. Within a day, the number of sites hosting the video had doubled again, each watchable by thousands.

It is just an example of the paradox that innovative communication networks are being used for international terrorism, the so called 'online Jihad'. Terrorist organizations no longer work from caves; their propaganda distribution system has shifted from hand-carried cassette tapes to vastly superior online methods. Cyber services are being used to expand networks, exchange real time information, recruit, training and fund raising. (Hacking is also a chronic offensive maneuver of the terrorists but it is consciously kept outside the purview of this write up.) They are playing around twitter, facebook, blog, video games, emphasizing on winning battle of ideas, maximizing psychological impact of terrorist acts. For example, a jihadi video game, equally thrilling, does not end in game over rather 'Congratulations! You have become a martyr'.

Now living in a cyber space as a global being, Bangladeshi society is likewise suffering from radicalization of young people and 'cyber jihad'. And the typical theory of madrasa no longer exists in such case, rather cyber jihadis attract the cream of educated young people from well to do families. The case of Nafis or killers of blogger Rajib, who were students of a top private university, are such examples.

In the last few years, it had been really difficult for the terrorist organizations to operate overtly. But for that time being they used cyber world as a safe haven. It comes into fruition exploiting turmoil political situation for the last few months. According to South Asian Terrorism Portal, during the last eight months of this year the number of fatalities related to Islamist terrorism is 206 that include civilian dead 116, security forces 13 and terrorists 77 whereas the total number of fatalities between 2005 and 2012 is 65.

In a recent move, government has captured a bunch of leaders of different terrorist organization, namely Ansarullah Bangla Team and Harkatul Jihad (HUJI). It comes out in interrogation that terrorist organizations have been recruiting members through social networking sites. They have strong technical expertise on telecommunication technology. According to an alleged terrorist, who was interviewed by the Bangla daily Jugantor, in the last five years Huji recruited ten thousand cadres and supporters through facebook and e-mail.

Numerous websites in Bangla and English language are delivering jihadi messages in different forms. If we take some samples of websites, operating in Bangla language one will be able to comprehend the dangerous situation.

Recordings of Jihadi Fatwas are uploaded in these websites. In Jumu'ah kutba (http://jumu'arkhutba.wordpress.com) one will find audio of Jihadi Fatwas by Jasimuddin Rahmani, mentor of the recently held Ansarullah Bangla Team. This site also shares jihadi audios taken from international forum of Al Ansar Mujahideen website.

In one of the audios posted in the same site, Ustad Md Faruque, head of Dawah and Media wing of Tanzim Al Qaydah Pakistan encourages Muslims of Bangladesh to start jihad against the government. He repeatedly reminds them of the Jihad of Haji Shariatullah. In an interview with a media called as-Sahab, Ustad Faruque claimed himself a member of al-Qaeda.

A video sharing site named Qital Tube (www.qitaltube.blogspot.com) one will find video titled Jihade Fire Eso (Return to Jihad), Ek Jhak Bullet (A cluster of bullets), Tagut ke Borjon Koro (Reject Idolatry). In the Ek Jhak Bullet, it is shown that A jihadi is blowing up our National Parliament Building.

In recent times, we have seen the impact of such propagandas when thousands of pictures and video showing dead bodies, allegedly killed by law enforcing agencies in the May 5 incident, flooded social networking sites. Even, Human rights organization and different political parties claimed hundred of deaths following these social sites.



Image taken from Qital Tube

With the rapid evolution of this virtual dynamics of terrorism, counter terrorism efforts, particularly in Bangladesh, seems yet to gear up to the point of deterrence: prevention from taking any terrorist action by fear of consequence.

An effective deterrence strategy has two parts: information operations and creating counter narrative.

Information operations no longer suggest shutting up web pages rather tracking down these sites for information on terrorists and their sympathizers.

Cyber security expert Peter W Singer enumerates such an information operation: "In 2008 and 2009, U.S. intelligence agencies reportedly tried to attack and shut down the top terrorist propaganda websites on the anniversary of 9/11, to try to delay the release of a bin Laden video celebrating the attacks. In 2010, however, they took a different tack. As Wired magazine reported, "The user account for al-Qaida's al-Fajr media distribution network was hacked and used to encourage forum members to sign up for Ekhlasa, a forum which had closed a year before and mysteriously resurfaced. The new forum was a fake, the equivalent of an online spider web, stickily entangling would-be terrorists and their fans."

Bangladeshi law enforcing agencies have been following the same track and it has already achieved success with several information operations including arrest of Ansarullah Bangla Team Leader Jasimuddin Rahmani, opined a reliable source of law enforcing agency when asked about government's attitude towards these jihadi websites.

As it is a battle of ideas, there is very little effort from the government side to create counter narrative. Creating such narrative is important to influence the cognitive state of the potential jihadis and their sympathizers and prevent them from embarking on a course of action that they may wish to take. It is assuring to see online activities of concerned citizens to counter arguments and propaganda of jihadis. Government efforts should complement these sensible activities emphasizing more on cyber presence that will deradicalize and weaken credibility and legitimacy of the advertent 'online jihadis'.

The writer is Editorial Assistant, The Daily Star. E-mail: sajen1986@gmail.com

Afghan conundrum and the inexact future

SARWAR JAHAN CHOWDHURY

IT doesn't look as if the NATO operation against Afghan Taliban has on the whole been a big success, although the Taliban are on the run and there isn't much news of the Al Qaida. Nor is Zawahiri popping up in the footages with jihadi exhortations as frequently as before. And Mullah Omar is alive but his outfit is much weakened and dissipated after nearly a decade of precision strikes by state of the art armaments.

On the other hand we can see the rebuilding of Afghanistan by the Karzai government. Despite allegations of corruptions, there are some visible reconstructions in Afghanistan including political institutions. The solidity or fragility of those is yet to be tested.

Karzai has some power and support base of his own in the south of the country, where he comes from. The loose Northern Alliance allies is still holding out, perhaps due to the western aid, and it is rendering the Afghan central government some steam on the eve of NATO departure that would leave behind a token 15000 strong force to assist the 35000 strong ANSF.

The Taliban showed some tenacity in the war of attrition, but that's expected from the most intensely indoctrinated orthodox group in the world. Again, their refusal to accept the olive branch from the US or from Karzai, to be a part of the democratic process, signals that they might still be unreformed about their view of the world.

The ultimate outcome of post NATO clashes between Karzai government and the remnant Taliban is unpredictable. Whether Karzai forces have the motivation to fight will be tested after NATO departs.

Counting too much on NATO After 2014 may not be helpful, the alliance having spent a huge amount and suffered a large number, as many as 3000, of deaths. And American friendship isn't something eternal.

There are also questions about actual control of the land. Despite some sporadic attacks by Taliban, Kabul and the north are relatively safe as of now and Herat in

the west is probably the same. In the Pashtun dominated south, it appears that the major urban/ semi-urban population centers have the presence of the Afghan government's administration. The rural south is mixed. The big question is who would prevail in the new dispensation?

Afghanistan's neighbours have been exercising influence in its affairs in recent times. Pakistan wants Pashtun domination in Afghanistan. Iran is concerned with the safety of the Persian Dari speaking Hazara Shi'ites in the central Hindu Kush area. The Central Asian countries and the West want proper representation of northern minorities like the Tajiks and Uzbeks in the new political arrangement. And there is the issue of refugees hosted by Iran and Pakistan. And India, China and the Central Asian countries are concerned with any spillover effect.

There are also other big issues in Afghanistan. State and nation building is a daunting task, and there are multiple cleavages in the society. The most obvious is the ethnic cleavage. Barring the newly formed central authority and the ANSF, most of the warring parties belong to different ethnic groups dominating different areas of the country. There is also a Shi'ite-Sunni split. The Hazaras in the central provinces are Shi'ite minorities and the majority rest are Sunnis. But the south appears more orthodox than the north.

The ideological cleavage runs along the progressive moderate Islam vs. radical orthodox line. In Afghanistan, secularists in the western sense are almost nonexistent. Islamic values are so ingrained in the society that none can challenge it. Although they differ in the rendition and degree of implementation of Islam, radicals like Taliban advocate a puritanical interpretation of Islam in all walks of life.

This unreformed near-primitive society throws a great challenge to developmental endeavors alongside security concerns.

For the South Asian countries, the implications for the kind of Afghanistan beyond 2014 would be immense. Getting the Taliban into some kind of a political arrangement could seal peace for now. Their exclusion would mean continued conflict. A peaceful Afghanistan would eradicate a major source of worry

for the South Asian countries.

Afghanistan is a natural hub for trans-regional connectivity, South Asia, Central Asia, Western China and the Middle East can connect with each other through Afghanistan, which itself can get access to the sea in the event of increased cooperation.

Energy hungry South Asian nations may also expect to get connected to Central Asian oil and gas pipeline and even to the energy rich Russia, one of the leading energy extractor in the world. Although on a lesser scale, Bangladesh is also a development partner of Afghanistan. Some reputed Bangladesh based NGOs with international status, are operating in Afghanistan in spite of the security risk.

A troubled Afghanistan has security ramifications for South Asia and beyond as was the case on 9/11 and before. The vigorously indoctrinated radical emissaries and their local comrades in Pakistan, India and Bangladesh may continue or even increase their activities. 'Haqqani Network' in Pakistan is an example of one such cross border ally of the Taliban. There are many Afghan war veterans in Bangladesh. Many Quaoimi Madrasas and splinter Islamist groups take inspiration from Taliban doctrine.

An internationally active Taliban and Al Qaida alliance like before could pose substantial security threat to countries of South Asia. That would ultimately tie down the South Asian countries like Pakistan, India and even Bangladesh and the trans-regional ones like Iran, China, Central Asian countries, to the Afghan conundrum for a protracted period, and their mutual competition for influence would, in such case, worsen the regional security situation.

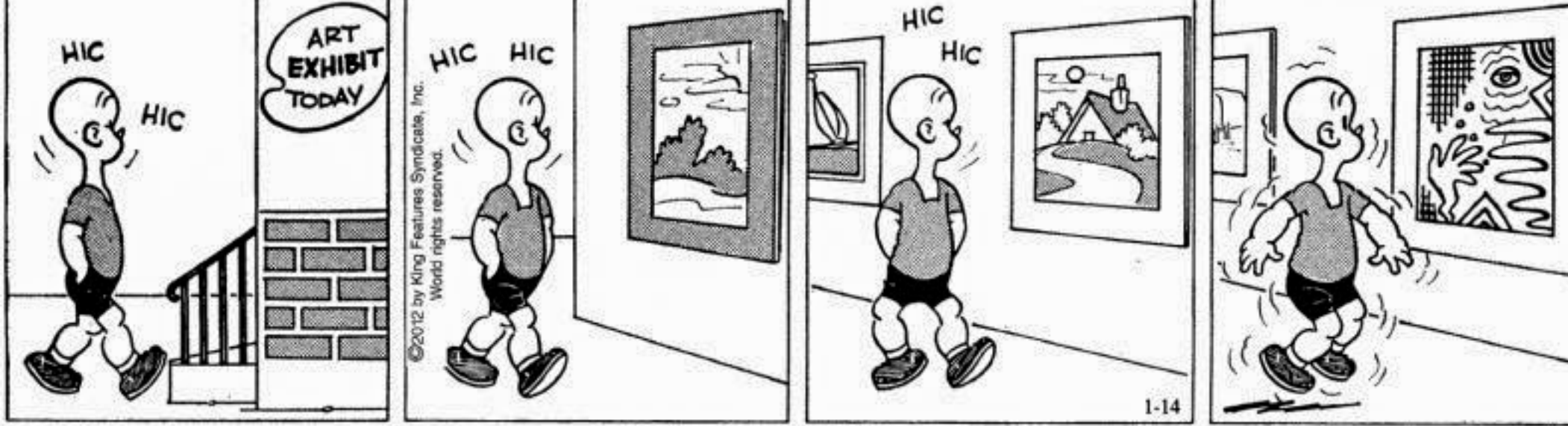
The world powers like the US and Russia, being unable to ignore the country for its terrorist nuisance value, may again engage in old-styled proxy war to put their respective allies in an advantageous position of power and influence. And the worst sufferer would again be the Afghan people.

The writer is an Associate Research Fellow in BIPSS which is organising an International Conference on "Afghanistan Beyond 2014: Implications for South Asia" on 9th September 2013 in Dhaka.

BEETLE BAILY by Mort Walker



HENRY by Don Trachte



QUOTABLE QUOTES

"No one can make you feel inferior without your consent."
Eleanor Roosevelt

AXYDLBAAXR is LONGFELLOW
One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

CRYPTOQUOTE

DX NSNISU XE H RUSKY ZM
OUBZMSF EXU LTS UIQQSF
ZDFZCZJJHAZLP XE TZM
UXYZDQ. - UHAOT YHAFX
SNSUMXD
Yesterday's Cryptoquote: THE FIRST SIGN OF MATURITY IS THE DISCOVERY THAT THE VOLUME KNOB ALSO TURNS TO THE LEFT. - JERRY M. WRIGHT

By THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS**
- 1 Unrefined
 - 7 Slant
 - 11 Other-worldly
 - 12 Onetime Peruvian
 - 13 Bring to mind
 - 14 Crockpot contents
 - 15 Scarcity
 - 17 "Lucky Jim" author
 - 20 Put up
 - 23 Freight weight
 - 24 Not at all
 - 26 Tipsy
 - 27 Bolt's partner
 - 28 Little rascal
 - 29 Depth charges, in slang
 - 31 Confederate general
 - 32 Girder material
 - 33 Inactive
 - 34 Day-dreamer
 - 37 Sacred bird of Egypt
 - 39 Orbital point
 - 43 Sugar source
 - 44 League of Nations base
 - 45 Goals
- DOWN**
- 1 Nasty dog
 - 2 Count starter
 - 3 Pendulum path
 - 4 Goes through
 - 5 Mall come-on
 - 6 First name in jazz
 - 7 Cafe's cousin
 - 8 Outside of captivity
 - 9 Superb serve
 - 10 Cutting tool
 - 16 Doesn't own
 - 17 One of the 33 "The Borgias" star
 - 18 Like some brownies
 - 19 Afoot
 - 21 Caravan creature
 - 22 Melville novel
 - 24 Counting everything
 - 25 Convent resident
 - 30 Stops
 - 35 Graffiti signatures
 - 36 Dueling weapon
 - 37 Bar cubes
 - 38 Prohibit
 - 40 Attain
 - 41 Second person
 - 42 Have something

ALTER TABOO
SORTA
KNUCKLEDOWN
SEE EAR ESS
TIGER
CAPON OASIS
ALEX POCO
TEPID MIXED
CAPED
SAD RAIT HOE
TRICKLEDOWN
AGRIE LULLED
GOTTION SEEDS

Yesterday's answer

- 17 One of the 33 "The Borgias" star
- 18 Like some brownies
- 19 Afoot
- 21 Caravan creature
- 22 Melville novel
- 24 Counting everything
- 25 Convent resident
- 30 Stops
- 35 Graffiti signatures
- 36 Dueling weapon
- 37 Bar cubes
- 38 Prohibit
- 40 Attain
- 41 Second person
- 42 Have something

Crossword Puzzle

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11									
12									
13	18	19		20			21	22	
14									
15									
16									
17									
23									
24									
25									
26									
27									
28									
29									
30									
31									
32									
33									
34									
35									
36									
37	38					40	41	42	
39									
43									
44									
45									

NORTH SOUTH UNIVERSITY

The first private university in Bangladesh

ENLISTMENT NOTICE

Applications are hereby invited from the bona fide firms for Enlistment as qualified vendor for the fiscal year 2013-2014 of the North South University. The firms who are engaged in business of the following items may apply:

Category No.	Items
Category - 01	Brand/Clone Computer, Printer, Scanner, Computer Accessories & Printer Toner/Cartridge.
Category - 02	Photocopier Machine, toner of Photocopier and Repairing .
Category - 03	Air-Conditioner, Parts and Repairing.
Category - 04	Office Stationery & Cleaning items (Paper, Stapler, Soap etc).
Category - 05	Furniture (Wooden & Steel).
Category - 06	Networking Equipments & Accessories.
Category - 07	Chemicals, Accessories, Reagents, Glassware's & Lab Equipments. (For Lab)
Category - 08	Printing Press.
Category - 09	Audio Visual products (MVP, Sound systems).

Vendors are requested to submit their application (s) with following documents:
a) Valid Trade License b) Certificate of Incorporation (if any) c) Income Tax Certificate d) VAT Registration Certificate e) Bank Solvency Certificate f) List of Clients g) Brief profile of the firm h) Distributorship/Agency/Dealership Certificate and any other relevant papers.

The vendors must have minimum 3 years supply record. One vendor may submit application for more than one Category but have to be submitted separately. Applications are to be submitted to the undersigned on or before September 19, 2013 within 3.00p.m. clearly mentioning the Category name and number on the top of the envelop .

Director (Logistics & Resources)
North South University
Plot # 15, Block # B, Bashundhara, Dhaka-1229
Phone: 8852000, Ext. 1204 & 1213
Fax: 8852016, 8845165