

BANGLADESH-CHINA RELATIONS

The challenge of competitive cooperation

PROF. ATAUR RAHMAN

BANGLADESH'S foreign policy under Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina seems to focus more on the 'East', envisioning a future course more geared towards China, rather than the 'West'. A number of Bangladesh's mega projects, including the Padma Bridge and the Ganges barrage, were given to Chinese Companies. The Agreement on 'deep sea

seafaring industry.

Political relations
A remarkable aspect in political relations between the two countries is that changes in regimes in both countries have not affected bilateral relations; rather they have continued to grow from strength to strength. In fact, there is a noticeable continuity in China's relations with Bangladesh. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina undertook a high-profile five-day official visit to China

negotiate weapons transfers, inspect military facilities, and explore areas of defence cooperation. Chinese advisers and technicians have periodically served in Chittagong and Dhaka to assist with making Chinese equipment operational in the Bangladesh armed forces. As early as 1987, Yang Dezhi, Chief of the general staff of China's People's Liberation Army (PLA), conducted a five-day goodwill visit to Bangladesh. Today, almost 70% of Bangladesh's defence inventory, comprising fighter aircrafts, frigates, coastal patrol boats, and tanks, is supplied by China. Bangladesh Air Force looked to China for the bulk of its aircrafts as well as for training. Most of Bangladesh's Air Force inventory included Chinese versions of the Old Soviet MiG 19 and 21, and Chinese A-5s and F-6/7 type fighters.

The Bangladesh Army has been equipped with Chinese tanks including the recently procured ones. Since 2005, Bangladesh has emerged as a major buyer of weapons made in China. In 2008, Bangladesh set up an anti-ship missile launch pad near the Chittagong Port with assistance from China. Bangladesh Navy successfully test-fired an anti-ship missile with a strike range of 120 km from the frigate BNS Osman near Kutubdia Island in the Bay of Bengal. Although the current government in Dhaka led by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is favourably inclined towards India, the regime has continued its policy of defence cooperation with China. The Bangladesh Navy has an ambitious plan to acquire two high-value submarines, a number of frigates, large patrol aircraft, patrol craft, two landing craft utility (LCU), hydrographic unit, salvage vessel and missile boats and equip some ships with missiles in the next five years.

Maritime cooperation in the Bay

China looks at the Bay of Bengal as an important maritime space for its future connectivity, trade and energy link to the Indian Ocean and its security landscape. China's ambition is also propelled by a constellation of strategic, commercial and security considerations. The paramount concern animating Chinese interests in the Bay and Indian Ocean is energy security, an imperative that has been widely discussed and debated in media and academic studies. China's use of naval power to preserve its vital interests in the Indian Ocean is already being perceived by other powers as causing a security imbalance in the region. It is thus being factored in a major way in the strategic calculi of India, US and others. China's current strategy in the Indian Ocean is to make its presence felt through building a credible naval strength. Being the world's second largest economy and having very high dependence on imported oil -- all of which passes through the strategic channels located in the Indian Ocean -- China needs to have close ties with littoral states in the Bay. It is no wonder China is gradually but purposefully expanding its economic and political influence among states in the region.

Future direction

Despite the power gap between China and Bangladesh, the two countries have shown clear commitment over the years to building "a positive, cooperative and comprehensive relationship" that will surely pick up the momentum in the coming years. Indeed, Bangladesh's relations with China over the next decade clearly present a host of opportunities. Never in history has the Middle Kingdom emerged as an indispensable economic partner to Bangladesh as it does today. Many people think that Bangladesh's comprehensive economic partnership with China could help Bangladesh become a manufacturing - trading nation pushing the latter's growth trajectory to a new height. Bangladesh's diplomacy at this stage needs to be highly creative and anchored on national consensus. At the same time, Bangladesh needs to be careful that its ties with China should in no way pose any threat to Indian security in the region nor jeopardise relations with the United States, which intends to re-engage and play a more constructive role in Asia.

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The bomb hurler



NADINE SHAANTA MURSHID

Whoever fights monsters should see to it that in the process he does not become a monster. If you look too deeply into the abyss, the abyss will look into you.

-- Nietzsche

Another bus was burned in the capital on December 28 in the name of protests. People stood back and watched as flames engulfed the bus. But this wasn't a first for most people. And definitely not the last.

Let us assume that it does not matter, for the sake of argument, who is behind these raging infernos -- the killings, the destruction of public property, the spread of fear. It does not matter who is funding the making of the bombs, the firearms. It does not matter why this is the choice of protest, or what the demands are. What is the most troubling is, to me, the motivation of the individual who hurls bombs at buses filled with people (or otherwise). What makes me cringe is the thought that he stands and watches the fire burn, perhaps proud of his handiwork.

Who is that man? How did the universe create such evil?

And then Susan Neiman speaks to me. "Evil is not merely the opposite of good but inimical to it. True evil aims at destroying moral distinctions themselves. One way to do so is to make victims into accomplices." Think about it, she silently implores.

That man -- and others like him -- have been bought. Such people have been brainwashed to believe in an ideology that makes the use of violence acceptable, an ideology that is all pervasive, more compelling than the people themselves. This ideology, bolstered by poverty and hatred of 'others', allow them to perform the most heinous acts without questions or qualms. These ideologues -- puppeteers par excellence -- know how to use people against people. Indeed, they are the ones who have nothing to lose -- materially or otherwise, because all is already lost; and they readily turn into accomplices.

Neiman's conceptualization of evil makes sense to the extent that we can shift blame away from that individual who hurled the bomb at the bus in which a teenager was sleeping to those who have enslaved him with their ideology. It makes sense, then, to imagine that these are the work of a networked group of people, the brainchild of a particular group who has the power to wield violence via power, money; via instigation and propagation of violence itself. Jamaat-Shibir comes to mind, as does the world-as-one-Islamic-Caliphate utopia that they believe in, a belief that justifies the killing of *kaafirs*, non-believers. So do the student wings of the Awami League (AL) and Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) that have been involved in violent activities of their own for decades. Not to be ignored is the state's use of force, perhaps stemming from the notion that states are not functional if they are unable to control the use of violence by potential terror groups, or to suppress forms of violence that threaten to disrupt normal lives, and even to maintain existing social power relationships.

But, what about their moral impulses or Adam Smith's "moral sentiment"?

Evolutionary scientists argue that moral impulse is a product of natural selection, many of our moral impulses remain today because they served a purpose; one of those moral impulses is cooperation. As such, people are inclined to getting along with one another because they are endowed with the ability to empathize and feel compassion; they have the ability to differentiate between good and bad. With this moral gene intact, how is it that people engage in strife? Joshua Greene, in his book *Moral Tribes: Emotion, Reason, and the Gap Between Us and Them* makes the argument that we are able to function in homogeneous groups but are unable to make compromises with another group because we do not agree on what a moral society should look like; we can cooperate, but not *universally*. Added to that is the layer that Wright (2013) adds: "you forget your sins (or never recognize them in the first place) and remember your grievances," thus making it that much more difficult to cooperate with heterogeneous groups.

In Muslim majority Bangladesh where most people are Bengali (i.e. the population is homogeneous) politics have played the divisive role to create heterogeneous groups; people are primarily aligned with the AL or the BNP, while other political parties align with these parties based on shared values and expected returns. Based on AL/BNP's ideas of what a "moral society" should constitute, their supporters and student wings have fought many a street battle, and their party heads have indulged in at least one awkward telephone conversation and many heated "debates" in parliament. Their differences are not about to change. This inability of each party to engage with the other in a healthy, civil manner is reminiscent of Greene's notion of heterogeneous groups' inability to cooperate with each other.

But that sounds like an excuse. We are not hunters-gatherers living together in small groups. We have evolved from that. We have learned modes and skills of communication, we have acquired intelligence, including emotional intelligence, and we have learned how to conduct ourselves "civilly," how to deal with conflict. Which means we are not doomed to be wrought with violence because our forefathers did not know how to deal with differences; ideological differences and differences in values cannot keep people at war because we are equipped with the skills to negotiate them. The reason why the evidence around the world leans more heavily in one direction -- the direction of "war" vs. "peace" -- is not because we do not have the ability to cooperate, but because these conflicts benefit *some* people. People who sit on top of the 'food chain', power brokers who keep the masses busy fighting each other while they amass wealth and more power.

Back to the man who hurled the bomb

Back to the bomb hurler again: what is his profile? If somehow we could take away the poverty, the buying and selling of souls, the engagement with the "wrong" people, would he have been a different person? Would he have refrained from hurling the bomb?

Or, if we control for socioeconomic factors, environmental effects, peer pressure, bad company (and so on), will we find that he lacks empathy and that allows him to hurl bombs at people in buses, without affect, without an emotional response?

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port' which was supposed to be signed during Sheikh Hasina's 'landmark' visit to China in June 2014, was, however, withheld. Indeed, China's 'peaceful rise' as a global power and increasing engagements in South Asia provide the principal dynamics to Bangladesh-China relations. But will Bangladesh be able to engage China in creative and competitive cooperation and sustain a long-term relationship with the second most powerful country in the world? How will the 'India angle' affect the relationship? What will be the role of the US which many observers feel is already diminishing in the region? Indeed, Bangladesh's foreign policy today faces a formidable challenge in maintaining a "balanced relationship" especially with the superpowers.

Strategic context

Geopolitics in South Asia has undergone some significant transformations today with China emerging as an important actor. Indeed, China's increasing influence in its South Asian neighbourhood provides an opportunity -- not a threat -- to states like Bangladesh. But there are important limits on what China can and cannot do. Exerting influence on development and security is one thing, but to model the political pattern and social dynamics is quite another. Notwithstanding, China's rise, often neglected as a factor in South Asia, is encouraging a more nuanced US approach to its South Asia policy as a whole, one that has not been fully comprehended in its "Asia Pivot" strategy.

Historical and geopolitical links

China and Bangladesh share time-honoured history, splendid culture and unique trade links. It is noteworthy to mention three dimensions of historical convergence. First, many Chinese and foreign scholars believe that the Southern Silk Road was the earliest link between China and the Indian Subcontinent and also the shortest distance covered by ancient Chinese inhabitants of border areas when they entered the Indian Subcontinent through Myanmar; second, Southern Silk Road served as an indispensable bridge for cultural, scientific and business exchanges between China, especially its Southwestern region, and India; and third, from 13th to 17th century, the Chinese had mastered the most advanced ship building technologies that propelled its oceangoing trade into the Bangla region, which already had a booming

in March 2009. It was her first visit to China as the prime minister. The much anticipated high level talks between Hasina and her Chinese counterpart, Wen Jiabao, was a crucial stepping stone in Sheikh Hasina's ambition to get a "comprehensive partnership" with Beijing. The landmark second visit, made in June 2014, dealt with a spectrum of issues significant for both the countries. During her stay in China from 6th June to 11th June, the Bangladesh Premier met with several key personnel including Premier Li Keqiang, President Xi Jinping and Chairman of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), Yu Zhengsheng. During the visit, various bilateral issues were discussed with the Chinese leadership. Economic issues dominated the agenda, more specifically the Chinese financial support for mega infrastructure projects.

Economic cooperation

The most powerful aspect of Bangladesh-China relations over the past decades is economic cooperation and interdependence. China very appropriately looks at Bangladesh as a trading nation and a "bridge between South and Southeast Asia". China's phenomenal rise as the world's second largest economic power is indicated by its huge economy and its reserve of three trillion dollars. Bilateral trade relations between the two countries have been growing steadily. The volume of trade increased almost six-fold in 10 years reaching a new height of almost \$ 10 billion in 2013-2014, although trade imbalance is very high in favour of China. The trade imbalance is a big worry despite China's zero tariff treatment to 4762 products. China is keen in relocating its businesses from China and has sought land from the government for a special economic zone for Chinese companies. In fact, a "high wave" of Chinese investment in Bangladesh over the next five years in critical areas, like infrastructure, energy development, and manufacturing, will definitely take China-Bangladesh relations to a new trajectory never imagined before.

Security relations

The importance of China in Bangladesh's security calculus underscores the uniqueness of our bilateral cooperation. Bangladesh turned to China for military equipment out of necessity at a time when neither the United States/western powers nor India were willing to fulfil our defence needs. Since the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1976, the two countries have been maintaining regular contacts to

QUOTABLE Quote

The best is the enemy of the good.

Voltaire

CROSSWORD by Thomas Joseph

ACROSS

- Last Greek letter
- Truman's hometown
- Spiked weapons
- Sports setting
- "Jericho" actress
- Letter after pi
- Dog doc
- Letter after pi
- Poker payment
- Velocity
- Longing
- Hereditary units
- Beer type
- Calendar markings
- Oodles
- Tiny amount
- Army doc
- Massage
- Tag player's cry
- French friend
- Cow call
- "My country - of thee"
- "Exodus: Gods and Kings" director
- Cove
- Asian peninsula
- Title documents
- Offensively vile

DOWN

- Poet Khayyam
- Prepare potatoes
- Canyon sound
- Toothpaste type
- "Yours truly" alternative
- Survived
- Rainbow shape
- Cat call
- Poker payment
- Velocity
- Longing
- Invitation to a hitchhiker
- Pious sort
- Hurried flight
- Pub pint
- Zeus or Apollo
- Foot part
- Letter after zeta
- Feeling down
- Astronomical sightings
- Newsstand
- Stocking staffer
- Like a desert
- Coal source
- Not busy
- Singer Amos
- Gossip bit
- Remain
- Went first
- Gen.'s underling

Yesterday's answer

C	H	I	P	A	P	P	S				
B	O	O	N	E	D	A	R	T	S		
E	R	O	D	E	S	N	O	R	T		
E	N	D	U	R	E	F	E	E			
T	E	E	S	N	U	D	I	S	T		
S	A	D	A	D	M	I	T	S			
C	H	E	E	R	S	P	I	P			
D	R	A	M	A	S	A	O	N	E		
R	A	W	A	I	T	E	N	D	I	V	E
A	W	A	I	T	E	D	S	E	L		
G	L	I	D	E	C	L	O	N	E		
S	I	A	M	K	E	N	T				

CRYPTOQUOTE

PQVG REXXAWL, SWWDJ, ROWPXEJ, TFA VGX LWWE, PGW UWBOA FWV SX GTIIC?

- WJUTE PQOAX

Yesterday's CRYPTOQUOTE:

IF HUMAN BEINGS HAD GENUINE COURAGE, THEY'D WEAR THEIR COSTUMES EVERY DAY OF THE YEAR, NOT JUST ON HALLOWEEN.

- DOUGLAS COUPLAND

BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker

SLOW DOWN OR YOU'LL BE IN BIG TROUBLE!

WHAT COULD BE WORSE THAN DRIVING YOU AROUND?

HENRY by Don Trachte