

War in perpetuity



SYED MANSUR HASHIM

BIN Laden is dead. But the war is on. It has been on since 2001. The "war on terror" is in full swing on a global scale. What Laden spawned continues to be a thorn on the side of the United States (US) and its allies. The original al-Qaeda is in retreat but other movements like ISIS and al-Qaeda offshoots have taken centre stage to wage holy war against "infidels." This scenario was probably not on Mr. President Bush Jr.'s mind when he chose to make war in Afghanistan and the disastrous campaign in Iraq later in 2003. Today, the US has withdrawn from both these theatres. Has the war been won? No. Will it ever be won? Perhaps we can revisit that question next decade.

What is clear is that US policymakers have reconsidered their earlier option to man "battle stations" and take the fight to Islamists with men and material on the ground. And whilst smart bombs over Iraq today make wonderful headlines diligently reported by embedded journalists, the war is at best being contained and not won. In the 13 odd years that have elapsed since 9/11, the world has not been made a safer place for anyone. According to State Department data 16 Americans were killed in terrorist attacks in 2013. That of course is not saying much since 33 Americans died in the US from lightning over the same period. Hence, while much hype continues to be put on the war on terror, more Americans were killed by lightning than terrorism. Yet, the threat cannot be wished away. It does exist.

Aaron David Miller, who has served six secretaries of state as an advisor on Arab-Israeli negotiations and currently Vice President for New Initiatives and a Distinguished Scholar at the Woodrow Wilson International Centre for Scholars, stated in an article recently: "President Obama has said that we will 'ultimately defeat ISIL,' the self-declared Islamic State also known as ISIS. Back in 2013 the president went so far as to suggest that the war on terror was over. But he's wrong on both counts. And here's why. First, we have yet to take care of old business. Talk to any terrorism analyst or CIA or FBI counterterrorism expert and they'll tell you that the most immediate threat to the United States comes not from ISIS but from an al-Qaeda affiliate, al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula AQAP. Sure we've had great success against the old core al-Qaeda in Afghanistan and Pakistan, killing Osama Bin Laden and

most of his top lieutenants, and dismantling infrastructure. But the Paris attacks were either directed or inspired by AQAP, making it obvious that almost 15 years after 9/11 we have yet to 'defeat al-Qaeda.'"

Whenever an Islamist outfit emerges, be it al-Qaeda or ISIS, conventional wisdom is to bomb it back to the Stone Age with the hope that it will stay there. But as history has taught us, every militant outfit or movement that has emerged from the Middle East is the product of "an angry, broken and dysfunctional Middle East where large ungoverned spaces in Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Libya, and widespread bad governance or no governance at all, combine with a growing sectarian divide between Sunni and Shia to feed extremism and violence." The brutal operations against a civilian populace carried out by government forces in Syria and the wholesale

deletion of the Sunni populace from the political equation in Iraq have been heaven-sent recruitment options for radical Islamic movements in the region.

With the US conveniently declaring the war being over in Afghanistan, time will tell whether the Afghan forces are up to the task of keeping the Taleban in check. What about the Pakistani offshoot of the Taleban? They have proved their potency in the recent attack on a school in Peshawar. What of the Islamist schools or madrassas churning out fresh zealots in that country ready to die in battle for what they perceive to be a just war against the "infidel" West? It is all very convenient to withdraw from a theatre of battle and let the locals sort it out to please a disenchanted US electorate, but what happens if these newly forged governments, imbued with democratic values in countries that have never had any notion or inkling of democracy before the US arrived simply collapse in the face of battle-hardened forces who believe they are fighting for their religion and God? What will be the response in such circumstances? More laser guided bombs and Tomahawk missiles fired from off-shore or a redeployment of conventional forces on the ground.

At the end of the day, the only thing that will work to check the rise of radical Islamist movements is to foster good governance in the Middle East and other trouble spots. Without better governance and a right to vote for change in autocratic countries, there will always be radicalisation. In countries that have significant Muslim minorities, there has to be more inclusivity. Failure to do so can only lead to more alienation among young Muslims, more incidents like Charlie Hebdo and a continuation of the "war on terror."

The writer is Assistant Editor, The Daily Star.



Response to 'Farewell to FDI?'

KALLOL MUSTAFA

THE op-ed piece ('Farewell to FDI?', The Daily Star, Jan 13, 2015) is based on some misleading and partial information regarding Asia Energy's (GCM) Phulbari Coal Project and the peoples' protest against it. The writer termed the peoples' protest against Asia Energy chief's visit to Phulbari as 'vandalism' but did not mention how, for a long time, Asia Energy has been trying to bribe the local youth, provide them with drugs and destabilise the local situation. He blamed the government and local administration for not taking action against the protesters and warned that this might harm foreign investment, without even mentioning the responsibility of the government to implement the Phulbari agreement signed with the local people and honour expert opinion against open pit mining on different occasions.

The writer declared the government official's denial of existence of mining contract with Asia Energy as "erroneous," as he completely relied on Asia Energy propaganda published in Energy & Power, but failed to present the correct picture based on original documents and experts' opinion already submitted to the government.

Based on the article 'Records Need making Straight', published in Energy & Power, widely known as lobbyist of Asia Energy, the writer states that Asia Energy has valid contract for mining with the government of Bangladesh and it obtained 'mining lease' in April 2004. But the April 2004 letter, which the Energy & Power article referred to as evidence of Asia Energy's mining contract, was indeed issued "...in the interest of preparing feasibility report and submitting to the government" and in no way can be used as a valid contract for mining operation. It was very clear in its following statement:

"(c) On receipt of the Feasibility Study Report, the technical aspects of the project will be examined and evaluated by experts and on the basis of this government will take final decision regarding real mining operation.

(d) Within this time, the lessee will not conduct any commercial activities of the mine." (Emphasis added)

He also missed the evaluation and recommendation of the expert committee (formed by the government and headed by Prof. Nurul

Islam) on the development plan submitted by Asia Energy. The expert committee in its report rejected the development plan of Asia Energy saying that:

- According to the Mines and Minerals Rules prepared in 1968 under East Pakistan Mines & Minerals act 1967 (Regulation & Development) and amended in 1987 and 1989, royalty rate was fixed at 20% of the price of produced coal at the mine mouth. Accordingly, the Bureau of Mineral Development (BMD) signed an agreement for Boropukuria coalmine on 10/07/1994 at 20% royalty rate. Yet, on 20/08/1994, only a month and ten days after having signed this agreement, the BMD signed another agreement with BHP for coal mining in Dinajpur and Rangpur areas at only 6% royalty rate. This agreement with BHP is illegal as per the then existing mining law. In this situation, this illegal contract may be declared invalid and steps should be taken against concerned persons according to Article 5 of Mines and Mineral Act 1992.
- According to Article 32 of Mines and Mineral rules 1968, which was in effect during the signing of the contract, as 3 years had already passed after first issuance of the license, the authorities did not have any right to extend the license period beyond 15/01/1998. For that reason the license renewal order on 26/01/98 for Area 'B' was illegal. During handover of the license for Area 'B' under the Assignment Contract [the transfer of contract from BHP to Asia Energy], BHP did not have any valid license to transfer as the license was already expired. That's why all actions taken by the Asia Energy in that block are illegal. BHP lost permission for all kind of activities in Block 'B' on 15/01/98 in consequence of which Asia Energy did not have any valid permission to work in that block. So Asia Energy never had any right to apply for mining lease.
- For the above two reasons, the Assignment contract signed with Asia Energy on 11/02/1998 has no legal basis. Alternatively, if it is considered that the application for the mining lease will be operated under Mining Rules amended in 1995, the government still cannot consider the Mining Lease Application because 3%

of the estimated cost of the scheme has not been deposited with the application as Bank Guaranty as required by the Rules. It is to be noted that 3% of the total estimated cost -- \$12,460 million (capital cost \$2090 million + operating cost \$10,370) is \$373.8 million, i.e Tk. 2, 616 crore. (Source: Article 5.2, Report of the Expert Committee (REC) to Evaluate Feasibility Study Report and Scheme of Development of the Phulbari Coal Project, submitted by Messieurs Asia Energy Corporation, (Bangladesh) Pvt. Ltd. (AEC), 20 September 2006 [Author's translation])

In brief, according to the expert committee, the contract and exploration license which Asia Energy received from BHP have no legal basis and the so-called mining lease (without permission of mining!) granted to Asia Energy under this contract is also legally invalid. That's why there was nothing wrong or erroneous when Energy and Mineral Resources Division Secretary Abu Bakar Siddique said: "Asia Energy has no valid licenses to develop Phulbari coal mine" (Daily Sun, 8 Dec 2014).

Therefore, the government of Bangladesh (GOB) has no legally binding obligation to allow Asia Energy to do open pit mining and mining related activities in Phulbari, and there is no question of damage payment to Asia Energy for scrapping the Phulbari project as feared by Mr. Syed Mansur Hashim. Rather, the GOB can easily reject its Feasibility Study and Mine Development Scheme for open pit mining following the recommendations of the expert committee.

In fact, the GOB has legal and moral obligation to scrap Phulbari coal project according to the agreement signed between the government of Bangladesh and the people (National Committee to Protect Oil Gas Mineral Resources Port and Power represented the people) on August 30, 2006. The agreement was fully supported by the then opposition leader and current Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. The main point of the agreement was: "Phulbari coal project will be scrapped and Asia energy will be ousted from the country." It is now the duty of the GOB to implement its legal and moral obligation to the people by taking action against illegal activities of Asia Energy.

The writer is an electrical engineer.

FEAR in the air

SHAMSUDDOZA SAJEN

"We learn from the history that we do not learn from the history"

G.W.F. Hegel

An aggressive course on peace

Those that are the loudest in their threats are the weakest in their position. A perfect example of this theorem is the present AL-led government. One of their party men has threatened to shoot down the opposition. Another, from sheer ignorance of history, has warned the opposition of consequences like Naxalites. The PM has said she will not tolerate any evil force (read opposition force). But, in our utter disquiet, we see she tolerates all the evil doings of her party members, if not give them indulgence.

Now, the chiefs of BGB, Police and Rab have joined the fray. Undoubtedly, they have overstepped their bounds threatening to use lethal weapons at the sight of a suspected arsonist. In the existing culture of extra-judicial killing and impunity for gross human rights violations, it creates an eerie feeling that law enforces are, now, openly pronouncing judgments on people's life. Joint operation has been launched in several districts and more districts will come under its ambit. A question irks one's mind, will the government be able to bear the burden of its actions?

Falling into pitfalls

Intransigence leads to irresponsible behaviour. This theorem fits BNP perfectly. AL denied BNP permission to observe 'democracy killing day.' In retaliation, BNP resorted to violent blockade that has already killed more than a dozen people.

In the Chauri Chaura incident in British India, where protests activities in the non-cooperation movement led to police opening fire and retaliation by burning of a police station, Gandhi immediately called off the movement. Appalled at the bloodshed, he went on a five-day fast in penance. Later, he started non-violent Salt Satyagraha, a very basic demand which touched every Indian's life and stirred the whole nation in his support.

Without hankering after foreign diplomats and foreign support, can't Khaleda Zia reinvigorate her protest by declaring a programme to visit Dhaka Medical's ICU unit or burn unit? At least, she would be able to see the consequence of her programme. AL and the administration do not have the moral right to deny her this move.

Consensus on national consensus

Recently, Sujon floated a list of recommendations on solving the current political impasse. They urged the parties to first reach a national consensus on the modus operandi of the election-time government. Then there are a set of programmes to be implemented by the government elected through a fresh election.

Sujon's proposal is undoubtedly well formulated. But it is over-focused on the elections. It seems they are putting the cart before the horse. The lack of rules in the game of politics is the core of our problem. First, we need to set rules or code of conduct for the politicians so that a competitive environment can be ensured where politicians will be restrained by the general will of the people. The joint declaration on code of conduct for political parties formulated by three alliances in November 1990 can be a good starter.

The joint declaration aspired for "establishing full democracy and a democratic system of governance in line with the spirit of independence and the War of Liberation." If we contextualise this aspiration in our present political crisis, the basic formula of national consensus should be to continue war crimes trials whoever comes to power. Why is it the top priority? Eminent intellectual and politician Kamruddin Ahmed answered this question eloquently in a letter to Dr. Kamal Hussain: "The trials of collaborators are not just to secure punishment of the criminals and murderers but to ensure that the same may not happen again in the foreseeable future. The more the trials there are lesser the chance of the revival of militarism and fanaticism" [Kamruddin Ahmed, Shadin Banglar Advodoy Abong Attapar, 1982].

Kamruddin Ahmed's youngest son Nazimuddin Azad was a martyr in our Liberation War.

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QUOTABLE Quote

It does not matter how slowly you go as long as you do not stop.

Confucius

CROSSWORD by Thomas Joseph

ACROSS

- Hint of color
- Reef material
- Oak's fruit
- Martini garnish
- Floppy cap
- Peripheral
- Sinuous fish
- Terminate
- Aquatic rodents
- Over again
- Iroquois tribe
- Girder material
- Whoop it up
- Cooking class, for short
- Staff member
- Finger joints
- Place
- Terminate
- Genius Newton
- Depart
- firma
- Hold up
- Chaplin persona
- Use the rink

DOWN

- File folder feature
- Glacier makeup
- Negative link
- College frat celebration
- Come in
- Table protector
- Antique
- Take the bus
- Stratford's river
- Give for a time
- Vegas
- TV series set in Korea
- "Do-others..."
- Appear
- Preview
- Demonic
- Hand over
- Pub pints
- Camera accessory
- Director's cry
- Seasonal ailments
- "Troy" star
- Manual reader
- Scarlett's home
- Sleeve filler
- In the style of
- Brewery sight
- Retina setting

Yesterday's answer

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

CRYPTOQUOTE

NT PKWT QND TKBO KJV DJT QDJFZT 12-6
 QPKQ NT NDZUV UXOQT ADBT KJV QKUM
 UTOO. -- VXDFIJTO

Yesterday's Cryptoquote:
 FORGIVE ME MY NONSENSE, AS I ALSO FORGIVE THE
 NONSENSE OF THOSE THAT THINK THEY TALK SENSE.
 -- ROBERT FROST

BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker

WE'RE TOTALLY LOST
 I SEE AN OPENING AHEAD

WE'RE TOTALLY LOST AGAIN
 I SEE SOME TREES AHEAD

HENRY by Don Trachte

GARAGE FOR RENT

FOR RENT 2 1/2 AN HOUR

A XYDLBAAXR 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.