

Suing Saudi Arabia for 9/11: Another American obsession

Over 1000 children killed in four years

We must do much more to protect children

A report by Child Rights Advocacy Coalition, a platform of 10 NGOs has revealed some chilling data – around 1,095 children were killed over the last four years. This is a horrific scenario especially since these children did not die of natural causes. The causes of these untimely deaths include murder after abduction, murder after rape and suicide. Almost a thousand children were raped in this timeframe.

Such frightening statistics begs the question: What kind of society have we become?

The number of news reports on minors being kidnapped and then killed, murdered to settle scores by grownups, tortured to death because of some trivial reason, sexually abused and then their lives snuffed out, exposes a disturbing rise of violence in society, especially against children. This is despite the various international conventions and laws we have signed to protect the rights of children and ensure their physical safety.

Child rights activists have recommended a speedy trial process for child victims of rape and torture, something that could act as deterrents to potential perpetrators. The harsh reality is that many of these young victims are from poor families and are forced to work in conditions where they have no protection whatsoever. They are at the mercy of their employers. Laws therefore have to be enforced against children being employed for hazardous work. Employers must be held accountable for the health and wellbeing of children they employ.

Children's mental health is another issue that is grossly neglected in our society even though it is a crucial part of child development. Research and awareness campaigns have to be initiated by both private and public initiatives. Stalking, bullying in school, unnecessary pressure to perform well are some of the reasons why children resort to suicide. As a society we must sensitize ourselves to the emotional needs of children whether as parents, teachers, employers or policymakers.

Hilsa catches go to waste

Lack of infrastructure the biggest barrier

HILSA occupies a unique position in the culinary of Bangladesh, a delicacy that families eagerly await. Due to its massive demand, it also costs quite a lot, and the average family can afford to consume Hilsa only once in a while. So, in a country where demand is so high, thus driving up prices, it is absolutely unbelievable that due to lack of cold storage facilities, fishermen in Sitakunda are having to dump their catch into the sea. Hundreds of dead and rotten fish float in the sea and adjacent canal, as fishermen who had hauled in huge catches, had no way to preserve the fish for the market.

Neither is this an isolated case: that our logistical facilities are poor is well-known. Adding to that, the local traders in Sitakunda had hiked prices for ice and salt when the demand for the preservatives increased. In this situation, cold storage facilities would have allowed the fishermen to keep the additional 2.5 tonnes of fish, adding to their income. This would also in turn be good for the consumers, as prices would go down due to increased supply.

It is interesting to note here that just this week Thailand has expressed eagerness to import hilsa from Bangladesh, which would add to diversify our export basket and open avenues for increased export earnings for Bangladesh. So, not only for local demand, but for export opportunities, cold-storage and other infrastructural facilities are absolutely essential. We urge that the government to take necessary steps for such logistical infrastructure, and encourage the private sector to do the same. Being able to facilitate these fishermen can only bring us good tidings: at home and from abroad.

STRANGER THAN FICTION



Taj Hashmi

AMERICAN S since the founding of the United States seem to be in a perennial state of narcissist obsession. Narcissism is all about excessive self-love, extreme interest in oneself, arrogance, selfishness, and a grandiose view of one's own talents, virtues, and righteousness. This collective disorder of self-glorification is not a new phenomenon for Americans. French historian/diplomat Alexis Tocqueville pointed out this in his travelogue in the 1820s. He wrote about Americans' insatiable love for praise: "They unnecessarily harass you to extort praise, and if you resist their entreaties, they fall to praise themselves", and they believed, "there is not its [America's] equal in the world". The recent enactment of the highly controversial "Justice Against Sponsors of Terrorism Act (JASTA)" in the US Congress is yet another example of American self-glorification.

Despite American pundits' and President Obama's strong opposition to the JASTA bill, jointly introduced by Democratic and Republican lawmakers in mid-September, the Senate enacted as law with an overwhelming majority – 97 against one – on September 30th by overruling the Presidential veto. Although the Act empowers US courts to try any sovereign nation for injuries, death, or damages to Americans within and outside America, it's immediate objective is trying Saudi Arabian officials who allegedly orchestrated 9/11, by the family members of the victims of the terror attacks.

As one analyst believes, the US is supposed to lose most as the major sponsor of unauthorised wars and invasions in various countries, who could also try Americans in their courts for compensation for killing tens of thousands of people, and destroying countries like Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, and Libya. Although subjecting foreign nations to US courts is a breach in the sovereign immunity enjoyed by all sovereign nations as granted by international law, it seems America is playing the "American Exceptionalism" card in the most erratic and unpredictable manner.

To put it mildly, while apparently the

objective of the act – giving the families of 9/11 victims their day in court – seems compassionate, it actually complicates the US-Saudi relationship, and further exposes US vulnerability, double standards, and duplicities; and above all, gross unpredictability, which Donald Trump extols as a super quality for himself and his country. Far from sending "a message that evil shall not prevail", as Senator John Cornyn (one of the main sponsors of JASTA) has epitomised the Act, it is rather going to prove, as Obama has predicted, "Enacting JASTA into law, however, would neither protect Americans from terrorist attacks nor improve the effectiveness of our response to such attacks".

Erasing sovereign immunity to independent nations amounts to trashing the age-old tradition of respecting the

by "taking such matters out of the hands of national security and foreign policy professionals and placing them in the hands of private litigants and courts." He has rightly assessed that the law would also likely further strain relations with Saudi Arabia, a critical Middle East partner with whom the US is already on rocky ground. Interestingly, both Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump have been over-enthusiastic about the JASTA. They don't want to go against the overwhelming majority of Americans, whose political consciousness leaves much to be desired, favour the Act, and even a "regime-change operation" in Saudi Arabia.

While the US government and the 9/11 Commission do not hold Saudi leadership accountable for the attacks, many US analysts believe some senior Saudi leaders supported al Qaeda and

the kingdom to be sued for the 9/11 attacks will have negative repercussions, including its curtailing official contacts, pulling billions of dollars from the US economy, and persuading to scale back counterterrorism cooperation, investments and US access to important regional air bases. The influential daily has urged the US Congress to repeal the Act "before it could do more damage". "The desire to assist the Sept. 11 families is understandable", the NYT has argued, but it also raises the question "at what cost?"

Although there's no reason to consider Saudi Arabia to be respectful of minorities, human rights, and women's rights, yet one can't justify the way US lawmakers enacted the JASTA, just for the sake of cheap popularity, and possibly some hefty financial compensation to the victims of 9/11 attacks by the Wahhabi regime. This Act is another attempt to whitewash the discredited Bush Jr. regime, which miserably failed to prevent 9/11, and instead attacked Iraq to topple Saddam Hussein with all the lame excuses and false allegations.

Nothing could be more consequential than defending inept US politicians on the eve of the Presidential and the midterm Senate elections with some hyper-patriotic piece of legislation. Both the major parties in the Congress – who represent the rich and powerful, or the proverbial "One Percent" in America – want to perpetuate their hegemony on the masses through lies, intimidations, deceptions, and distractions. Keeping Americans obsessed with terrorism – which is by no stretch of the imagination a major security threat to their country – is a clever ploy indeed.

Had Saudis been really somehow responsible for 9/11, the US Administration could have mobilised mass support for a regime-change operation in the Kingdom, instead of invading the wrong country to topple the wrong regime, Iraq and Saddam Hussein. In view of this controversial legislation, one may raise the questions: a) Why did the US Congress wait 15 years to punish Saudi Arabia for its "role" in the 9/11 attacks? b) Why instead of waging a retaliatory war against the Saudi regime (as a corollary to the "War on Terror"), the US Administration has decided to slap on its wrist with this silly piece of legislation, which is again a violation of international law?

The writer teaches security studies at Austin Peay State University. He is the author of several books, including his latest, *Global Jihad and America: The Hundred-Year War Beyond Iraq and Afghanistan* (Sage, 2014). Email: tajhashmi@gmail.com



sovereignty of the smallest and weakest nation on earth, and is tantamount to legitimising a super power's arm-twisting smaller nations to surrender their sovereignty to the former, because it not only has a mighty military machine but has also courts to try them for their actual or alleged involvements in injuring or killing its people, or damaging its properties, within and beyond its borders. The JASTA nullifies the Foreign Sovereign Immunities Act (FSIA), enacted during President Ford's tenure in 1976. It's noteworthy; the concept of foreign sovereign immunity had been at work for many years prior to the enacting of the FSIA.

Obama has aptly said in his 1,300-word veto message that the legislation could harm US counterterrorism efforts

those who took part in the 9/11 attacks, because 15 of the 19 hijackers, who were members of Al Qaeda, were Saudi nationals. Then again, nothing could be more preposterous than proposing trials of Saudi officials in US courts with at best inadequate, and at worst non-existing evidences, for their alleged role in the attacks.

We may agree with the *New York Times* that although Saudi Arabia is a difficult ally, at odds with the US over many issues; it's home of Wahhabism, which has inspired many of the extremists the US is trying to defeat, but "it is also a partner in combating terrorism"; and that "the legislation could damage this fraught relationship". Riyadh and its close allies in the Gulf Cooperation Council are warning that US legislation allowing

The race for global supremacy

MUHAMMAD AZIZUL HAQUE

THE Cold War that began in the wake of World War II between powers in the Western Bloc (the United States, its NATO allies and others) and powers in the Eastern Bloc (the Soviet Union and its satellite states) terminated with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. However, it now seems a new Cold War has begun sometime back. This time around, the main actors are not the US and Russia – the successor state of the Soviet Union – but the US and China. The US has enjoyed unparalleled primacy in the world for many decades now. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union – its arch rival during the Cold War years – the US has been the only superpower in the world. It has been the only country in the world since then with the capability to project power to any corner of the world. However, with the change in the economic fortune of the major countries of the world, the geopolitics and the global balance of power are changing too. The US feels alarmed as its primacy in the world and the current geopolitical balance, at least in the Asia-Pacific region, if not in the whole world, is under a formidable threat from rising China.

China's rapid and spectacular economic development over the last three decades and its becoming the second largest economy of the world by overtaking Japan at the end of 2010 are seen as challenging the United States' primacy in the world. The amazing economic achievements of China and its fast expanding trade and economic ties with countries across the continents, including the US, have given it tremendous self-confidence to assert itself in the world as a rapidly rising power and has brought it new prestige in the comity of nations, and the resultant strategic weight and global clout.

China has been swiftly supplanting the US as the larger investor and trading partner of many countries across the globe. In 2011, China was the larger trading partner for 124 countries and the US for 76. Despite some slowing down in its economic growth rate over the last couple of years, China is likely to surpass the US in an all round way by 2049, the centenary of the founding of the People's Republic of China. It is said to have already surpassed the United States in

terms of Purchasing Power Parity Gross Domestic Product (PPP GDP). Needless to say, economy provides the lifeblood in politico-military primacy. The US is not likely to allow China a smooth and unimpeded passage to the position of the largest economy and, politically and militarily, the greatest power in the world; the status the former still enjoys.

Against the backdrop of its current economic strength and growing politico-military influence, China is increasingly asserting itself in the international arena and assuming global roles and responsibility; for instance, by creating alternatives to Bretton Woods Institutions (AIIB, BRICS Bank, etc), and establishing international connectivity initiatives, namely

region.

The rivalry between China and the United States is not underpinned only by the economic competition. It is equally, if not more so, in the context of today's world, a competition for geopolitical supremacy. For the US, it is a struggle to retain its economic, political and military primacy as the number one power in the world; and for the rising and increasingly more assertive China, it is to ascend to the position of the number one power in the world by replacing the United States. The struggle has intensified so much that we are now probably witnessing a cold war between the two countries – the two foremost economic and political powers of our time. And other major powers are



PHOTO: CHESS PLAYERS, IRVING AMEN

Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB) and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road ('Route,' instead of 'Road', could be possibly more appropriate). That, however, necessitates greater military strength to be able to project power in its own region and beyond. So, it is further strengthening its military, especially its maritime power to protect its interests in the seas, and to protect its sea lanes in the Indian Ocean and in the straits through Southeast Asian countries, connecting the Indian and the Pacific oceans to secure safe passage to and from the Middle East on whose oil China's dependence is enormous. Many of China's neighbours are worried about China's military build-up and increasingly assertive bearing in the

polarising around them. India is showing propensity to side with the US while Pakistan with China. Japan and South Korea as well as some Southeast Asian countries like the Philippines, Vietnam, Brunei, Malaysia and Indonesia having territorial disputes with China in the East or South China seas are polarising around the US. Russia and North Korea are also siding with China, although Russia might depolarise later, for it would be also apprehensive of a very strong and militarily mighty China on its doorstep. Europe was the epicentre of the previous Cold War. The epicentre has now shifted to East Asia. So, the EU might exhibit some hesitancy to come clean and join any of the two sides, for it's not going to be directly affected by the latest

geopolitical rivalry. Moreover, many of the EU – and European countries have deep and vital trade and economic ties with China.

The United States seems to consider its perceived threat from China so huge and alarming that it appears desperate in its bid to contain China. The two countries' economic interconnectedness and interdependence, not to mention mutual cooperation on a number of global issues, are so deeply entrenched that they are not likely to opt for any open military confrontation between themselves, for that would prove mutually and immeasurably self-destructive. So, the only option is to resort to and remain engaged in a cold war – unless one of the two sides goes berserk and triggers an open confrontation or 'hot war'. Although the new cold war seems to have already begun sometime in the recent past, the military logistics deal between the US and India signed a month ago and the Pakistani cabinet's go-ahead of a plan to conclude a long-term security pact with China at about the same time, seem to constitute a clear plunge into another cold war. The polarisation of countries has assumed a clear configuration in the wake of these two events.

In fact, China might find it difficult to properly materialise the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road and then keep it fully operational at all times. However, the ongoing implementation of its new overland silk routes (SREB) that would run through the Central and West Asian countries and connect China to the Middle East, Europe and Africa, may strategically become a convenient parallel alternative to the Maritime Silk Road. Hence, China would not fully depend on the sea lanes for import of its crucially needed oil from the Middle East.

China's much coveted ascension to the top of the world is not expected to be a trouble-free and unchallenged leap. The rest of the world outside its ambit should hope the New Cold War would not eventually slide into a world war – the Third World War – for that would have the potential to annihilate our contemporary civilisation and put the decimated humanity back to the Paleolithic age.

The writer is Former Ambassador and Secretary.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

Commendable poverty reduction in Bangladesh

Recent World Bank poverty estimates reflect the remarkable achievements made by Bangladesh. From 40 million poor people seven years ago, the figure has come down to 28 million today.

We must salute the two heroes behind this success for their continuous efforts in poverty eradication – Professor Dr. Mohammad Yunus with Grameen Bank and Sir Fazle Hasan Abed with BRAC.

We must also show our gratitude to the people of Bangladesh who are the main catalyst behind this great change.

Md. Shahjahan Mia
 Development Professional, Dhaka

Congratulations, UN Secretary General!

We welcome Antonio Guterres as the next secretary general of UN. It is expected that many good changes will occur in the world during his tenure. We hope the days to come will increase food production to feed the hungry millions, cure conflict in different parts of the world, and bring us closer to world peace.

Shafkat Rahman
 Class 6, BIAM Model School and College