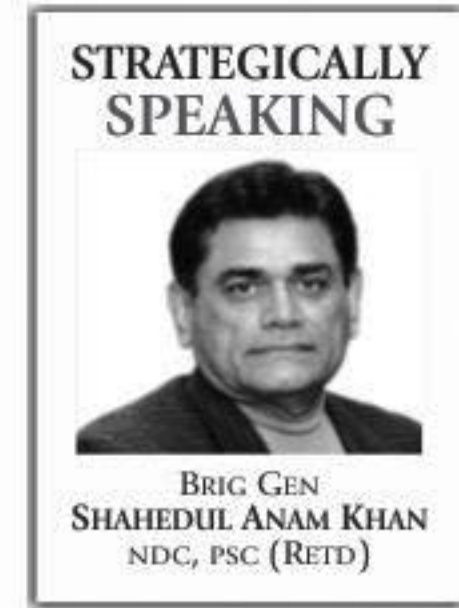


The 'Thucydides trap' might become a reality



STRATEGICALLY SPEAKING
 BRIG GEN SHAHEDUL ANAM KHAN, NDC, PSC (RETD)

Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides' Trap? (war resulting from a dominant power's fear of a rising power) by portraying equivalence between the US, the dominant power (Sparta), and China, the rising power (Athens) respectively, may well-nigh eventuate.

However, it may not be China that the ruling power considers the threat which must be suppressed but two "recalcitrant" countries that won't fall in line with American diktat. One a country not quite far away from China which it has tended and nurtured throughout its 65 years of existence—North Korea—and the other Iran, which the US considers a threat to its vital interests, particularly a direct threat to its principal ally and proxy in the Middle East, Israel, and its Arab allies whose pathological animus towards Iran the US and Israel have so cunningly exploited.

In some ways it is the Middle East conflict that has kept an important driver of American economy, the military-industrial complex, running. It is the behemoth that Eisenhower had warned against because of its strong and pervasive control on the powers of decision-making of the state, which has increased consistently since his farewell

speech in 1961. To quote from a *New York Times* article, "roughly 10 percent of the \$2.2 trillion in factory output in the United States goes into the production of weapons sold mainly to the Defense Department for use by the armed forces (of its own and of a large many other countries)." Perpetual war, as one writer puts it, assures perpetual profit for companies and their lobbyists but causes perpetual loss to the families, which the government hardly notices. And this industrial complex is bolstered by some Middle Eastern countries which have outsourced their security to America. What with the Saudi-US arms deal worth

North Koreans have proved a pain in the neck for the Americans. But when it appeared that after 70 years of uncertainty, and of possibility of war breaking out in the peninsula, the statesmanlike approach of the new South Korean president shedding the baggage of history, brought the possibility of a rapprochement between the main contending countries in the conflict—the Koreans, and the supra regional power, the US. Of course China's role in persuading its protégé Kim Jong-un to accede to a meeting not only with his southern counterpart but also with the American

ultimate fate that the US-backed rebels brought on Gaddafi, since that fit in with the West's plan to get rid of a man it felt threatened by. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's threat to crush Iran by economic sanctions—as a first resort—sounded like the beating of war drums. It was long predicted, after the fall of Saddam, that Iran would be the next US target. It is coming to pass; whether that will actually happen is a matter of opinion. Bringing Iran down to its knees through sanctions because it seeks to pursue its national interest—just as the US wants to pursue its own interest which is the

Callous disregard for freedom fighter's burial

Bamboo mat instead of national flag!

WHAT are we to make of the fact that a freedom fighter was buried in Pabna's Bera upazila last Saturday with full state honours, but instead of the national flag his body was draped using a chatai (bamboo mat)? The deceased freedom fighter was a leading organiser of freedom fighters in the area and his burial was attended by the local administration that included a police guard of honour. Why then couldn't a national flag be found to give the man a befitting farewell? This shows precisely how much neglect exists at local level when it comes to showing proper respect for a person who commanded much respect for his contribution to the war of independence.

We take pride in our struggle for independence but the utter disregard to follow what is considered standard procedure by the local administration in this case, cannot be overlooked. Although the assistant commissioner present at the funeral has said that it was a "mistake", this incident merely highlights the shallowness in thinking on the part of the administration. When the "mistake" was noticed, should it not have been rectified? We expect an investigation into the matter and those responsible for making arrangements from the administrative side be called up and made to answer for this oversight. Simply washing it away as administrative bungling will do little to assure us that it will not happen again in the future, or assuage the frayed sentiments.

Outrageous act by hospital

Dumping newborn's body in dustbin

IT is outrageous that a private hospital in Chittagong would dispose the body of a newborn in the Chittagong City Corporation's garbage dumping ground last Tuesday. According to our report, one expectant mother was admitted to the port city's People's Hospital and went under C-section under the supervision of two gynaecologists. Although the woman was pregnant with twins, after the surgery, the doctors only brought a baby girl to the relatives of the patient, saying that her twin was dead. When they asked for the body of the other newborn, the hospital authorities said they disposed of the body in a dumpster.

The doctors, under whose supervision the babies were born, need to answer why the baby had died in the first place. It seems from the way the hospital authorities dealt with the whole incident that there was negligence and inefficiency on part of the doctors in delivering the babies. Otherwise, why would they hurriedly throw the baby's body in the garbage dump without even informing the patient's attendants? In any normal situation, isn't it natural for the doctors to give the dead body of the baby to the parents or attendants?

This incident has once again brought to light the grave professional negligence and misconduct of the doctors and staff of our private and public hospitals. Only last March, there was a similar incident in Comilla Medical College Hospital where doctors had split a newborn baby's head during a caesarean section operation and dumped the baby's body to hide their act. Such incidents are on the rise in the country as hardly any legal action is taken against these doctors and hospitals. In this specific case, the hospital authorities, the doctors and staff involved must be held accountable and punished according to law.

Bringing Iran down to its knees through sanctions because it seeks to pursue its national interest—just as the US wants to pursue its own interest which is the complete dominance of the region—is a first step. That is a recipe for war, because pressure without a workable alternative cannot lead to anything but confrontation.



US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo recently gave what observers touted as his major Iran speech at the Heritage Foundation in Washington, DC.

PHOTO: AFP

nearly USD 110 billion signed last year, to face what Saudi considers the main threat to the Arab world—not Israel but Iran.

The apprehension of rising powers drawing the ire of the ruling power is a historical reality that the world has witnessed regularly over the ages. And in the present-day context, the Chinese vying for influence in not only the region but in regions far distant from its shores have the lone superpower in strategic overdrive to counter it. The recalibration of American strategic focus from the Asia-Pacific to the Indo-Pacific, though not a new formulation in terms of geographic identity, indicates US' renewed interest in the region. And that has been spelt out in the US National Security Strategy published in December 2017.

The possibility of such an eventuality had been articulated by Chinese President Xi Jinping way back in 2012 during his meeting with President Obama, and in his writings too. But then he had also discounted such a possibility on the grounds that such a situation might prove counterproductive and result in defeat for the aggressing big power, a fate that befell Sparta for a variety of reasons.

president was vital too.

But the prospect of the US-North Korean summit is uncertain. All because the US had presented the North Koreans unofficially with a "heads I win, tails you lose" option when the hawkish US National Security Advisor John Bolton offered the so-called "Libyan option" as the basis for the forthcoming negotiations. It is only natural that anyone with a modicum of self-dignity will dismiss a fait accompli of complete capitulation. The fate of Gaddafi cannot be lost on anybody, particularly an autocrat whose survival in the face of US might depend entirely on having a credible deterrence. But what was equally worse than the Bolton suggestion was the usual Trumpian ignorance of history, threatening Jong-un with the same fate as Gaddafi if the North Korean leader didn't make a deal on his nuclear weapons programme, betraying his ignorance that the Libyan option was actually Gaddafi agreeing to surrender his nascent nuclear weapons programme, including allowing his uranium centrifuges to be shipped out to the US. "Decimating" Gaddafi was not in US' plans but it did not grudge the dictator's

complete dominance of the region—is a first step. That is a recipe for war, because pressure without a workable alternative cannot lead to anything but confrontation. And that is perhaps what the regime-change obsessed advisers of Trump want.

Thus, while China may not be in US crosshairs at the moment, those that stand directly in the way of US hegemonic proclivities are. And that is the subtext of *The History of the Peloponnesian War* which Thucydides penned in his account of the epic war that the Athenian representative told the representative from Melos (immortalised as the Melian Dialogue): the powerful will do what they will and the weak must suffer what they must. While this metaphor is often used in diplomatic relations, what is almost always forgotten is what the Melos representative told the Athenians. That there must be just dealings between all states. Otherwise one might find one's own "fault attended by the most terrible consequences."

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DIGITAL SECURITY ACT

It has ramifications for us all

SAYEED AHMAD

THE human rights situation of Bangladesh was reviewed at the UN Human Rights Council on May 14, 2018 under the Universal Periodic Review mechanism. During the review, along with several other issues, the state of freedom of expression, especially the status of the draft Digital Security Act (DSA), was discussed in depth.

Several countries raised concerns about the draft DSA and expressed that some provisions of the Act have the potential to infringe upon people's right to freedom of expression. Norway and Sweden in particular recommended reviewing and redrafting the DSA.

After the meeting of owners of private television channels, the Editors' Council, and the Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalists (BFUJ) with the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Post, Telecom and ICT on May 22, 2018, we got the word from the law minister that necessary amendments will be brought into the draft DSA and the committee will sit again with the same representatives once the parliamentary committee concerned revises the draft further.

This is of course a welcome move from the government and we are grateful to the Editors' Council, BFUJ and Association of Television Channel Owners (ATCO) for constantly pushing for the revision of the draft.

However, the consultations between the government and media organisations only (so far) raise a question: Is Digital Security Act only a

concern for media? The law minister, after the meeting, said to the media: "We will not enact any law aiming at journalists or one that will create obstacles to independent journalism." But will the DSA only affect journalists or people involved in journalism?

The DSA is basically aimed at targeting all kinds of online communication. So it is bound to affect

also targeted and the "positive" outcome of these terrible developments was that the media came forward and strongly voiced their concerns.

There is no problem at all in media taking the lead; rather it has been very effective. That is what is expected of the media and they have thankfully constantly highlighted the issue and taken it forward in a constructive

anyone can provide feedback. But where is the process which will allow any ordinary person to give his or her feedback? Has the latest draft been made available for the public so that everyone can have a look? Has the government held any consultations with other stakeholders except media representatives?

During the UPR session the government took time until September



anyone and everyone. If we look at how the infamous Section 57 of the ICT Act has been and is being used and misused, we will see that after the draconian amendments made to it in 2013, bloggers, writers, activists and even ordinary people were targeted in the beginning creating widespread fear among online activists and social media users, ultimately leading to self-censorship. Later on journalists were

manner. Moreover, this has led some of us to be hopeful about possible amendments to the draft, although we will have to wait and see to make any final judgment on this.

But what is worrying is the way the government is currently dealing with the issue. It sends the message that there are no other groups that have a stake in the DSA. The government might say that

Has the latest draft been made available for the public so that everyone can have a look? Has the government held any consultations with other stakeholders except media representatives?

2018 to convey their final position with regard to the amendment of the DSA. Hopefully, the government will use this consultation process to ensure that the DSA is redrafted ensuring freedom of expression in its full extent and in line with international standards.

Sayed Ahmad is a human rights activist based in Bangladesh.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Suicidal tendency among students

Every year after the result of SSC/HSC exams is published, it's almost obvious that some frustrated students would commit suicide. According to a recent report by Shishu Odhikar Forum, 13 students committed suicide after this year's SSC result was published—a 43% increase compared to last year.

Students are often told to study only for good grades. Such fixation may lead to depression in the event of a frustrating performance, leading to suicide in the worst-case scenario.

I think the students should be allowed to study for pleasure and enlightenment. Parents and teachers have a big responsibility in that regard. Harun Md Shahed Bin Naim, *Kushitia*

Formalin use must be checked

Some dishonest traders use formalin in food items to give them longevity and an artificially fresh look to attract buyers. Several studies have found that many food items available on the market contain a dangerous level of this harmful chemical.

Formalin may cause several complicated diseases such as kidney failure, liver damage and lung issues. It also may weaken the body's natural defence mechanism against infection. Formalin's adverse effects on pregnancy and the reproductive system have been well studied and proven.

The use of formalin in food amounts to slow poisoning, and such a crime cannot go unpunished. Our authorities should ramp up efforts to contain this despicable phenomenon. Pushpan Chowdhury, *By e-mail*