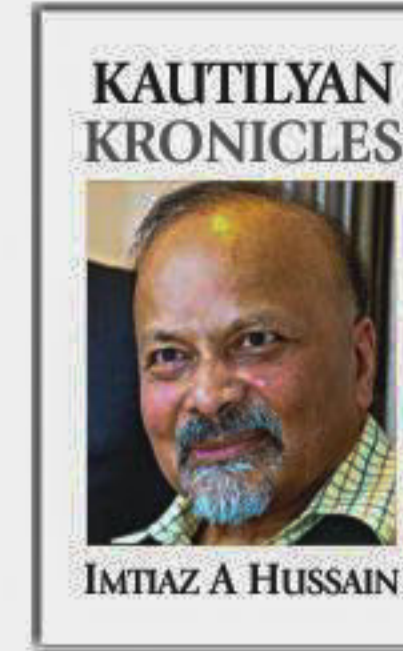


The game of bluff and brinkmanship

Trump's emerging style



IMTAZ A HUSSAIN

WITH 2018 being the first functional year of Donald Trump's foreign policy paradigm, a pattern seems to be emerging: brinkmanship as the starting point, as much to contrast his approach to his predecessor(s) as to reaffirm the relative strength of the United States that even US citizens were beginning to seriously doubt. Why that approach has not yet exploded, as can be deduced from at least four test cases, may be a function of the multiple faces of bluff: either a bluff that the other side has caught and readies itself to call the United States to heel, or a bluff through which a surrogate country executes the deed (shaming the previous administration's policy platform/position on it as a guideline) with the United States aggressively cheerleading.

Identifying those four tests gets the ball rolling: opposing the P5+1 2015 denuclearisation deal with Iran that the Obama administration concluded with Britain, China, France, Germany, and Russia; denuclearising North Korea, an objective aggravated by Kim Jong-un's own brinkmanship superseding his US counterpart, for example, by firing its first inter-continental ballistic missiles in 2017; cutting Chinese trade surpluses down to size, not only to expose that Trump is keeping abreast of his campaign pledges but is also revitalising a roaring economy that is just not cutting it anymore; and shifting the US embassy to Jerusalem in Israel in order to feed the Middle East's anti-Iran cordon as a possible surrogate to directly denuclearise Iran.

Of course, not every one of these goes through the same bluff pattern, and indeed bluff may be more a last-resort action than a conscious policy-influencing ploy, given the combative vested interests within the country (Republican factions, for example) and abroad. As the State Department's personnel-shift from Rex Tillerson to Mike Pompeo indicates, bluff may have

facilitated the transition from the routine diplomatic approach to a more hawkish stance. If that means this administration's foreign policy positions lack an anchor, so be it: it may be too early to tell for sure, but that they rally around certain "instincts" can certainly be better supported. In short, those instincts have thus far rallied around bashing Obama's record, and with it the Democrat Party posturing; restoring an unassailable US position with the military as the spearhead; placing China in its own subservient slot; cleaning up the US cultural stock by calibrating immigration and

stripe, that is, other democracies, culturally similar countries, or heavily cultivated diplomats. Perhaps this is because dictatorial patterns resonate better with what he himself does or says, but his intervening business relations or family connections suggest Trump's springboard to be far more personal than organisational: that is, subjective rather than objective. This sets him apart from many of his predecessors, yet draws similarities with Richard M Nixon's.

Iran is among Trump's top priority. He promised to scuttle the P5+1 deal during his campaign, and by following

with transatlantic partners, regardless of the P5+1 deal.

Brinkmanship here invokes clusters of opposition: Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the United States against, on the one hand, P5+1 Iran supporters, and on the other, China, Russia, Syria, and possibly Turkey. Whether his policy preference prevails or not, local in-fighting is guaranteed in zones already under combat: right across the Middle East Shi'ite Arc, from Lebanon through Syria and Iraq into Iran, but also within Israel through more compressed Palestinians, the same people Trump wooed with the promises of a two-state solution

negotiations serves as an indicator of what more China can do over the Iranian (and North Korean) issue. China is so deeply inside Iran that any conflict cannot but infringe upon Chinese investments and operations there; and Kim's sudden return to a belligerent tone over the denuclearisation ultimatum from the United States by at least stalling, if not cancelling, the Kim-Trump summit, happened right after Kim's second Beijing visit, ostensibly to get fresh instructions given the then stalemated China-US trade deal. The United States loudly announced how China would buy more farm products, but it was scheduled to do so anyway, negotiations or not. Its exports were not trimmed, but punches were conspicuous by their absence.

Kim inherently seeks normalisation in which denuclearisation results from piecemeal negotiations, an end-point rather than a starting point. After all, he invited foreign journalists to the inactivation of one nuclear site in the north, while he wants to convert another in the south of the country, on a beach, into a major global sea-side resort, obviously with US tourists in mind. How China intervenes here may expose the degree of Trump's bluff: either US Seventh Fleet, or retreat from the denuclearisation ultimatum. It is not an easy choice.

Finally, Jerusalem was the most personal of the four issues, but also where he seeks to mobilise Israel to do the dirty US work in Syria and, if necessary, with Iran. Netanyahu did not fish for words to brand Trump-based US relations the best his country has ever had. He might also have added the unique role of personal familial relations lubricating that relationship: not his with Trump's, but Trump's with various Israeli vested (business) interests and that "chosen people" bondage.

These carry the capacity to dictate patterns characterising the Trump presidency. That they also carry uncertainties demands further scrutiny.

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An Israeli flag is seen near the Dome of the Rock, located in Jerusalem's Old City on the compound known to Muslims as Noble Sanctuary and to Jews as Temple Mount.

PHOTO: REUTERS/AMMAR AWAD

cornering US minorities; and punishing US free-riders, mostly in West Europe. From this perspective, bluffing has helped smoothen the transition from guttural instincts to rational policy-making, without confirming that policies actually executed are indeed rational.

One other trait helps us understand Trump's foreign policy posturing: his innate preference for the dictatorial type, in particular the democratic leader who can easily turn on dictatorial taps over what might be called the "birds of the same feather" or "go with the flow"

through, he raised the stakes by leaving—through his current Secretary of State, Pompeo—a 12-point ultimatum. Accepting it means capitulating. Israel and Saudi Arabia want nothing less, and through Jared Kushner, his son-in-law, he not only managed to fire up Saudi Arabia with arms sales and Israel with an embassy shift to Jerusalem, he also hopes to nudge his European NATO partners out of the Iranian issue, which they wholeheartedly support. We see a personal, familial, and Israeli accent overriding historical diplomatic bonds

during his recent Middle East visit. What China and Russia do may help expose the bluff at hand: just as Israel and the United States have no option left but to go on the offensive against Iran militarily, the restraining factors may emerge from outside the area, with China and Russia being those sources.

In fact, Trump stays as far away from Russia as possible, given Robert Mueller's investigation, thus exposing a Russian weakness we need to monitor further. Yet how China quietly silenced the United States in the May 2018 trade

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What middle-income status means for Child Budget

MD ASHIQ IQBAL

ACCORDING to a report, Bangladesh has recently achieved the benchmark qualifications of a middle-income country. The certification of this status will take several years, as the UN would want to be convinced first that the country is unlikely to slide back to its previous state. But the fact remains that in 2018, we have met the criteria.

The new status means that the country is now more capable of dealing with the issues it is faced with by its own. Along with greater capacities to invest, we would envisage a change in the distribution of resources. With so many competing demands at hand, one would need to be prudent and ensure balanced and justified investment in physical, institutional, human and social infrastructures.

However, at the least, the change in the status and strengthened capacity should mean that there is less ground to accept denial of human rights, particularly that of the children. And this needs to be reflected through the resources we spend for children, as portrayed in the national child budget. The UN Convention on the Rights of the



PHOTO: SAVE THE CHILDREN

5.5 million children in the country are still outside education, and we have not observed the education budget to improve much in the recent past.

Child (UNCRC) that we have ratified makes it a responsibility of the State to progressively realise child rights and asks for the best possible investment in children in meeting that responsibility.

So how, and to what end, will the impact of this graduation be on the next child budget? We can cluster our expectations in three broad areas:

We will not let a single child die from preventable causes in their vulnerable years (before five): Despite significant improvements in the recent decades, Bangladesh still

faces high under-five mortality rate. At the national level, it is still likely that 46 of every 1,000 children will die before they reach their fifth birthday. This is higher in rural areas (56 in 1,000) and even higher among the poor (62 in 1,000 among the lowest wealth quintile). With rural and poor population being the worst victims, one strategic investment point could be the community clinics in which the government has already made significant investments. Unfortunately, while appointing medical professionals for those

community clinics, we did not prioritise children enough by recruiting child specialists. Through the next child budget for 2018-19, we should invest in this area and ensure at least one visit a week by a child specialist in every community clinic, if not every day.

Thankfully, in the last two budgets, there has been a significant increase in health budget. Given the low base (still only around 5 percent of the budget is going to the health sector), this trend needs to improve further. One estimation of the General Economic Division suggests that we need to increase the health budget by

Inclusiveness, particularly for those with disabilities, and quality aspects of our education services have not been a matter of pride for the country.

20 percent in the coming fiscal year to remain on track in terms of achieving the health-related SDGs.

We will ensure development opportunity for every child by ensuring quality education for all: While we can celebrate how we brought almost all children to education, two worrying facts remain: 5.5 million children in the country are still outside education, and we have not observed the education budget to improve much in the recent past. Inclusiveness, particularly for those with disabilities, and quality aspects of our education services have not been a matter of pride for the country. In the last budget, we saw a substantial slide in budget for education stipends at all levels. We would like to see a greater share of the budget going to education (UNESCO-suggested level is 20 percent), wider coverage of education stipends, and investment in disability-friendly education infrastructure in the budget for 2018-19. A widened mid-day meal project can be a great option to support the poor students to remain in school, besides its nutrition benefits.

We will not tolerate violence against our children anymore: We have seen increased incidences of

violence against children in recent days. We are yet to effectively curb the incidences of child marriage. Physical and humiliating punishment prevails in schools, workplaces, institutions, as well as in our homes. Child labour, sexual violence, abuse and exploitation of children remains pervasive. Often, we tend to accept that children are to face some level of violence while it needs to be completely the opposite—the last one to face an act of violence is a child. In this case, our resources need to be channelled towards strengthening the child protection system. In achieving SDG 16.2, where we seek to end abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence and torture against children, we need stronger institutions to implement stringent laws and deliver effective services, announcing our enhanced capacity to protect our children from all sorts of violence.

The more we advance towards the developing country status, the more we will see a shift in the development discourse away from resource availability to resource utilisation. Our children must be prioritised.

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QUOTABLE Quote

THOMAS CARLYLE
Scottish philosopher, historian, and teacher

No iron chain, or outward force of any kind, could ever compel the soul of man to believe or disbelieve.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Church area
- 5 Thin cuts
- 10 Field pests
- 12 Pageant topper
- 13 Mammal also called a ratel
- 15 Mendes of movies
- 16 Bright beam
- 17 Cloth scrap
- 18 Hold up
- 20 Hand over
- 21 Leafy lunch
- 22 Reduced amount
- 23 Deeply impressed
- 25 Be portentous
- 28 Informers
- 31 Persia, today
- 32 Premier
- 34 Knight's title
- 35 Flying mammal
- 36 Motor part
- 37 Fragrant-flowered vine
- 40 Green shade
- 41 Wildcats
- 42 "For -- sake!"
- 43 Pleads

DOWN

- 1 Had longings
- 2 Shows beyond doubt
- 3 Brahms piece
- 4 Ram's mate
- 5 Order to Spot
- 6 Topper
- 7 "My thoughts exactly"
- 8 Tire features
- 9 Privates' bosses
- 11 Damascus native
- 14 Kerchiefs
- 19 Visitor from space
- 20 Store worker
- 24 "Don't leave yet"
- 25 One of the chessmen
- 26 Red-and-black bird
- 27 "Shoot!"
- 29 Sing on a prank victim's back
- 30 Prison camp
- 33 In -- (disordered)
- 35 Tourney passes
- 38 Cain's mother
- 39 Young lion

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YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

STEM CARDS
TOME AWAIT S
ATOM MADCAP
GET OVER TRE
EMERALD ATE
LAYS STUD
ALL YR STEPS
TOOL SPA
ENG EMERSON
AGO LOWFARE
SEND AKIBIS
ESTATE SLOT
TOYED HENS

BEETLE BAILEY BY MORT WALKER

BABY BLUES BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT