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ROLE OF STRATEGIC STUDIES IN NATION BUILDING: A CASE FOR BANGLADESH

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INTRODUCTION

Suggesting any role for Strategic Studies in Nation Building process of developing countries like Bangladesh is somewhat unfamiliar, challenging and problematic. To many, it may also sound trivial because the role of strategic studies, if at all that forms a distinct field of enquiry, may not be anything unique in that somewhat similar role is played by studies in other disciplines—social as well as physical. On the contrary, going by the conventional militaristic conception of strategy, the pursuit of strategic studies is confined to defence and security affairs mainly in occidental frame of thinking. As such applicability of prevailing conceptual framework of strategy in the context of nation building in the Third World countries may appear to be rather far-fetched. Matters of vital concerns on which depend the survival, sustenance and growth of these societies are quite different from those of the developed ones. So also are the sources and nature of threats to security.¹ The proposition is challenging

¹ Very few works have been done on the security concerns of the Third World countries. They include, Talukder Maniruzzaman, Security of Small States in the Third World, Canberra Papers on Defence and Strategy, No.25 (Canberra: Australian National University, 1982); M. Ayoob, "Security in the Third World: The Worm is About to Turn?", International Affairs, Vol. 60, No.1 (Winter), 1983-84; and Jonathon Alford, "Security Dilemmas of Small States", The World Today, August-September 1984, pp. 363-369,
because there is no established conceptual framework of strategic studies appropriate to the Third World context. Very little academic resources excepting sporadic critiques from the West itself, have been devoted to this non-conventional approach to strategy and strategic studies.

The task is rendered problematic because the concept of nation building is not clear-cut and specific either. The concept still remains at emotive and rhetorical level. Moreover, the traditional marginalist approaches to nation building do not seem to provide the desired direction to the developing countries. To be precise, these erstwhile-colonial societies did embark on the task of nation building and socio-economic upliftment on attaining independence. But the task proved too stupendous to be able to resolve the basic problems of national identity and statehood in terms of national integration, attaining a concrete basis of nationalism, legitimate state authority, and even territorial and political sovereignty in real sense of the terms. The scenario is characterised by a vicious circle of underdevelopment, poverty, socio-political unrest and upheavals, internal and external tensions and conflicts. Many of them are even moving backward, despite some semblance of development in urban, industrial and technological fronts. On the social front, vertical and horizontal cleavages are getting pronounced, segmented and primordial loyalty is eating up national cohesiveness. Consequently, there is serious crisis of authority which paradoxically coexist with the strengthening and expansion of state superstructure through consolidation of power and resources on the hand and expansion of state-sponsored development activities and reaching out bureaucratic, political and coercive instruments to different sectors and pockets on the other.

Intrusion of modernisation and consumerist values amidst sheer resource scarcity and underdevelopment reinforces the divisiveness. The strains of modernisation render the socio-political base of the
state further fragile because such forces intrude before different ethnic, religious, linguistic and social groups could be brought within the national fold. The problem is compounded because economic and political development, and for that matter, nation building efforts are undertaken on different planes in a compartmentalised fashion. Something non-conventional with a very integrative approach and discerning vision is the need of the day. It is in this perspective that the present paper seeks to explore the relevance and role of strategic studies in the nation building process of the Third World countries.

The central argument of the paper is that prevailing Western context of strategic theorising and scope of strategic studies are not applicable to the Third World countries, but the concept of strategy as such and orientation to strategic thinking fitted in an appropriate Third World framework may provide very useful approach to nation building process in these countries. The paper concentrates on the following areas: (a) understanding the concept and major concerns of 'strategy' as it evolved over time, (b) reviewing the current trend of strategic studies, (c) relevance of the context, content and approach of prevailing strategic studies for Third World countries, (d) identifying the major nation building problems and (e) exploring the


3. One of the important recent reactions to this trend in the Third World is the rethinking of the ethno-centric development and nation building models. See for example, UNESCO and UN Asian Development Institute, Asian Rethinking on Development, (New Delhi: Abhinav Publications (1977) and more interesting exposition by Howard J. Wiardo, “Towards a Non-ethnocentric Theory of Development: Alternative Conceptions from the Third World”, the Journal of Developing Areas, Volume 17, No.4, (July) 1983, pp. 433-453. While much of the analyses stress the need for indigenous methods of development, further sharpening of the ideas and concretisation of models are required in the absence of which these arguments may appear to be mainly rejectionist.
areas and the ways in which strategic studies could play some specific role in nation building process of the developing countries.

The paper has been developed around the case of Bangladesh which not only is known as a 'test case of development' but also presents a typical example of highly unstable political system and an almost explosive social situation. In an otherwise homogeneous country it may be argued that, Bangladesh does not have any serious nation building problem as such in the conventional sense as used in Political Science and that the problems of poverty, population and food shortage and political instability posing enormous challenge to the nation are basically problems of economic and political development. But as the paper argues, the problems of development and nation building are so interlocked that any attempt to study them in isolation is bound to be infractuous. Likewise, the problems of security, the staple concern of conventional strategy, cannot be

4. See Jast Paaland and J.R. Parkinson, Bangladesh: A Test Case of Development, (Dhaka: University Press Ltd, 1977). Notable is these two authors' note of cautious optimism in their "A Development Perspective for Bangladesh", The Bangladesh Development Studies, Vol. IV, No.1 (January) 1976. In the initial years many tried to portray a grave picture by calling it 'an international basket case' or a 'bottomless basket case'. This image of Bangladesh perhaps no longer remains. But challenge before Bangladesh as put by Rene Dumont: "Bangladesh has to run fast in order to stand still" remains as formidable as ever.

5. In terms of ethnic and linguistic homogeneity, Bangladesh ranks 129th in the world with 98 percent homogeneity on an ascending scale in which North Korea and South Korea are ranked 135th with 100 percent homogeneity and Tanzania ranked 1st with 7 percent homogeneity. See, George Thomas Kurian, Encyclopedia of the Third World (London: Mansell Publishing Limited), Vol. I, 1982, p. 125.

approached on the traditional security front alone. In fact, the concept of nation building is a fairly comprehensive term requiring comprehensive and integrative approach. But before coming to the nation building problems let us understand what 'Strategy' is all about to put the propositions of the paper in perspective.

STRATEGY AND STRATEGIC STUDIES

Common perception about strategy is that it deals with activities relating to defence and national security, like planning and fighting wars or higher military direction of the armed forces and weapons system to attain certain definite objectives. Since the days of Clausewitz, who is regarded as the father of modern strategy, the concept, content and approach of strategy underwent many changes and gradually acquired broader denotation than the traditional militaristic formulation. But for all practical purposes, as argued in the following few pages, the pursuit of strategy remains highly defence-oriented, perhaps it has become more so in a sophisticated manner in that the present strategic paradigms are dominated by nuclear technology and nuclear weapons systems in which human and social aspects get relegated to the periphery or as best, used to the extent they are amenable to mathematical analysis.

But strategy has a context-neutral meaning as well. Strategy concerns the direction of resources to attain certain stated objectives.

7. In fact, the first major discussion on modern strategy during the 18th and 19th century was not initiated by Clausewitz alone but by another strategist as well, Antoine Henri Jomini about whom much less is written. In the context of Napoleonic warfare, Clausewitz emphasized on deeper insights into the weakness of enemy's ability to plan operations and on using them in a dramatic, far-reaching the fast moving fashion, while Jomini contended that there were clear principles of war with predicting capacity. For some detail, see Robert O'Neil, "Introduction to Strategic Thinking", in Desmond Ball (ed), Strategy and Defence: Australian Essays (Sydney: George Allen & Unwin, 1982) pp. 27-41.

The central question of strategy is how best to use the resources and means to attain the objectives. Strategy in this sense becomes an end-means relationship. It is presumed that strategy would concern certain vital interests of nations or societies. However, historically 'national security', 'war' etc. came to be interpreted as 'vital interest' of any nation, so intense and critically important as to impell the decision makers to risk peace and wage wars. Consequently, the context-value of strategy became prominent and at present, the terms strategy and defence strategy, for all practical purposes, are used interchangeably.

Changing Concerns of Strategy

This section reviews the nature of evolution of the concept of strategy over time. The conception of strategy at the beginning, was highly war-centric involving the use of armed violence in war. Clausewitz's definition of strategy as "the deployment of the battles as the means toward the attainment of the object of war" or Liddel Hart's military-force-centred definition of strategy as "the art of distributing and applying military means to fulfill the ends of policy" (implied: in war) all are ample testimony to that. In these definitions, victory in war was the end and battle or military campaigns were the means of strategy in war.

The first extension of the concept of strategy was on the means side as it went 'beyond the uses of armed violence' to cover the whole arsenal of means including the political, economic, ideological and

9. See O'Neill, op.cit, p.28.
12. O'Neill, op.cit., p.27
13. Lider, "Towards a Modern Concept of Strategic Studies", op.cit.,
technological factors. Since war became a total national affair involving the entire state power, unlike the pre-Napoleonic warfare between feudal lords and kings, strategy came to be interpreted as the art of using the entire state power to attain the objects of war. In other words, the other dimensions of strategy — logistical, technological and social — came to be recognised as important. It is the experiences of the American Civil War and the two World Wars that led to the appreciation of the importance of logistical aspects of strategy. Specially, during the Civil War, what proved to the decisive for the North was the capacity of the industrial and transport sectors to bring the largest and the best army to the theatre of operation and maintain it there in the face of the excellent operational planning of the South. But since pursuit of victory with somewhat destructive implications remained the object of war, the primacy of the operational and technological factors in strategy remained, the non-military aspects playing somewhat secondary role.

The second extension took place on the end side in which strategy was considered to go beyond war to include military activities in peace time and to attain non-military political goals. War was considered as the art of controlling all the resources of a nation in order to effectively promote and secure its vital interests against actual or potential enemies. Robert Osgood linked strategy with the objects of diplomacy when he said “Military strategy must now be understood as nothing less than the overall plan for utilising the capacity of armed coercion in conjunction with economic, diplomatic and psychological instruments of power to support foreign policy most effectively by overt, covert and tacit means”. The gradual broadening of the end side of strategy was effected mainly by the impact of

technological advancement, specially the destruction caused by the two World Wars and development of nuclear weapons that changed the total strategic thinking. The major concerns of individual nation states as well as the international community was the pursuit of peace and attain the political objectives of the state through peaceful means without the use of force. Consequently, “old concepts and old definitions of strategy have become not only obsolete but non-sensical with development of nuclear weapons. To aim at winning a war, to take victory as your object is no more than a state of lunacy”.17

The third extension of the concept broadened on both means and ends sides of strategy. Strategy came to be defined in a comprehensive sense as “the use of the entire state power (or of the aggregate of its economic, political, ideological, military and other potentials) for attaining the whole (or almost the whole) of its political goals”.18 In the process also evolved the concept of grand strategy or total strategy, which is the “management of the various components of power—social, political, military and economic—in order to secure in a society’s given environment, the society's survival and prosperity.”19 Kissinger echoed the same thing when he defined strategy as the “mode of survival of a society”.20 This is perhaps the most comprehensive meaning of strategy in that it takes into consideration the most fundamental objectives and vital interest of any society and implicitly considers all means of strategy. Of course, national security and military means to attain it remained one aspect of this aggregative end-means relationship.

18. Lider, “Towards a Modern Concept of Strategy” op. cit. p.218. Andre Beaufre also in a similar vein emphasised the need for devising an overall strategy which would incorporate and coordinate the political, economic and military instruments of policy. See, Andre Beaufre, An Introduction to Strategy (London: Faber, 1965.
However, such an extension proved to be highly elusive and not very widely accepted either. Rather, in a variant, preservation or defence of national security instead of the whole set of state goals came to be interpreted as the aggregate aim. The reason for such a short-lived nature of the comprehensive approach to strategy is not far to seek because "strategic thought draws inspirations each century, or rather each moment in history, from the problem which events themselves pose." The turn of events in the post-war period rendered international community's quest for peace highly elusive and fragile. In the context of global power relations, huge and continued stockpiling of nuclear weapons and the resultant nuclear stalemate was accompanied by the prominence of the philosophy of political realism in which international relations are conceived basically as power relations. And obviously military or defence strategy was considered the only viable means of the power. Thus, despite broadening of the concept and content of strategy, it remained basically defence-oriented on both means and ends sides.

Such a trend, incidentally has generated a body of self-critique in the West itself. Michael Howard speaks passionately of overlooking the social aspects when he refers to the "forgotten dimension of strategy". Neville Brown in "New Parameters of Strategy" also observes that in modern strategic thoughts, the socio-economic dimension has been played down unduly. Correlli Barnett also wonders: "How inadequate, therefore, the classical and purely military defence must be, how mistaken that compartmentalising of 'strategy' or 'defence' into a separate box from other aspects of national policy must be."

21. Lider, op.cit. p.218
22. Raymon Aron as quoted in Garnett, op.cit, p.5
24. Ibid.
Current Trends in Strategic Studies

While the origin of the concept strategy can be traced to pre-Napoleonic periods, growth of strategic studies as a field of enquiry is only a post-war phenomenon, the birth place again being the West, especially, the United States and Britain. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, the US and Western Europe were becoming increasingly vulnerable to a Soviet nuclear strike. Questions like political justification of invoking nuclear weapons or winnability of nuclear war induced strategic thinking not only among policy makers but also at the academic level. The foundations of contemporary strategic thought were laid down in a handful of American universities and institutes like the Rand Corporation, Hudson Institute, Brookings Institutions etc. Scholars like Barnard Brodie, Albert Wholstetter, Henry Kissinger, William Kaufman. Harman Kahn made valuable contribution toward the growth of strategic studies. Around them developed an enormous 'industry' of specialists and research institutions, dealing with security, military doctrines, foreign policy, technology, war and peace. It is no wonder than that the American strategic thinking had a good deal of influence over strategic studies in the rest of the world. The IISS in London established in 1958 and funded to a great extent by the Ford Foundation is primarily oriented

26. The use of the notion of strategic studies can be traced to 1958, and the proposition of Alastair Buchanan, the first Director of the International Institute for Strategic Studies, to connote the analysis of the use of armed forces in conflict situation. See, fn. 8 in Philippe Garigue, "Strategic Studies as Theme: An essay on Their contribution to Defence Policy and Operational Planning", Journal of Strategic Studies, Vol.2, No.3 (December) 1979.


28. Cynically called 'growth industry', war and peace establishment etc., by the scholars engaged in peace research.

to NATO problems. IISS along with the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) in Chatham House has contributed greatly to the development of the subject and a growing public awareness of its importance in UK and elsewhere. The Ford Foundation, which also finances much of the works of the Strategic and Defence Studies Centre and the International Relations department, both in the Australian National University takes active interest in supporting and encouraging graduate works and professional studies elsewhere where West’s interest is vital. Comments Peter King, “...a growing corps of highly trained cosmopolitan cadre capable of bringing strategic-analytic skills to bear on the conflict situation of the Third World is coming forward, and the journals are beginning to fill up with Asian, Arab and even African names”.

In this context, it would be pertinent to understand the nature of activities of these organizations, their status, linkages with government and other agencies. It should, however, be pointed out that little is known about most of the organizations because information/booklets, and journals are not available. Moreover, in many cases these published materials do not reveal the real nature of activities or their links with different organizations.

The major preoccupations of strategic studies organizations in the developed countries concern defence questions in general and

30. While giving a talk on “Strategy and Society”, Correlli Barnett said: “Much of the work of this Institute and its competitors has to do with the nuts and both current defence questions the problems of this or that NATO flank, the lessons of the last armed conflict, whatever and wherever, with regard to the utilisation of armour and airpower, and, for a change, discrete glimpse of how policy is shaping in the Ministry of Defence building next door”, See Barnett, “Strategy and Society” op. cit.

nuclear weapons and nuclear warfare in particular. To be precise, organizations like CSIS (Georgetown University), Heritage Foundation etc. engage in apparently civilian national issues like energy, transport, information, public opinion, but most of them are geared to defence and strategic issues. A second characteristics of strategic studies in the developed countries is that these organizations are mostly funded by private sources and they have strong and sometimes organic links with the universities. But the interesting feature of these strategists is that they can move freely between these bases and government positions. Equally important in the fact that the so-called dichotomy between civilian and military strategists is somewhat blurred in the Western context and some of the strategists have excellent combination of civil and military educational and professional backgrounds. This is a reflection of the state of civil-military as well as bureaucracy-academic integration that the developed societies have attained and this they also share with the socialist developed societies.

Strategic studies in the USSR are likewise focused on the East-West relations, systemic security and nuclear weapons system. But then there are important differences as well. The importance of social as well as logistical aspects in strategy is duly recognized unlike the West. Secondly, the strategic studies organizations naturally are government-funded and are under government control. Though the quantum of Soviet literature on strategy is much less than West, some of them provide deeper insight into the current global strategic situation.

Strategic studies in China, and also in Yugoslavia, however, provide refreshing departure in both tradition and environment from both Soviet Union and United States, although they conform to the former in at least one respect, government control. The most notable contribution to Chinese strategic thinking has been the theory of revolutionary war of Mao Zedong and influenced by great Chinese strategist, San Zu. Similar non-ethnocentric contributions
to strategic thinking have been made by Gen. Giap, Guevara and Kautilya. But unfortunately we do not read much about them.

Strategic studies in the Third World countries present varied patterns. One thing can be said in general that interaction of these organizations with the academic community is somewhat infrequent and the number of organizations sponsored by private groups is also small. Only very recently, centres/institutes and affiliated bodies are coming up in university faculties in some countries. On the other hand, linkage with government agencies takes various forms including fund, personnel and policy planning bodies. Affiliation with foreign institutions for logistics and financial support with government approval is not also uncommon. By status, most of these organizations are autonomous with varying degrees of autonomy. Some organizations are also within governments departments (Institute of Foreign Affairs and National Security in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of ROK).

In terms of activities, the general pattern is to deal with foreign policy, international affairs including global and regional security problems. Explicit concerns with national security and other vital national issues are very few. One example to the contrary may be cited about the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), Jakarta which deals basically with Indonesian problems, more specifically nation building questions in which the Centre makes important contribution. Out of 25 main fields of studies 10 pertain to international relations while the remaining field pertain to vital domestic fields like political institution, in Indonesia, problems of economic development, ideology and culture, income distribution and rural development, energy, capital and financial institution, development of the private sector etc. Activities of the Centre are organized in five departments—economic affairs, political affairs, sociocultural affairs, international affairs and external affairs. Somewhat similar role is played by Centre for Policy Research in New Delhi and Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies in
Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu. The former, however, discretely avoids defence and security fields unlike the New Delhi based Institute of Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA) which exclusively deals with these issues.\footnote{IDSA deals with problems of national security and the impact of defence measures on economic, political and social spheres. See \textit{IDSA Journal} and other publications. An interesting observation by an Australian scholar on the nature of Strategic Studies in the periphery: "It is too early to say whether or what distinctive orientations will emerge in the disciplines as it conquers the periphery, but certainly in New Delhi, for example, which boasts of Institute of Defence Studies and Analyses the orientation is not at all conducive to Western applause. Nuclear proliferation on India's part is almost an article of faith...". See Peter King, \textit{op. cit.} p. 375.} The Kathmandu based CNAS began to take interest in strategic issues only recently. It aims at providing "an 'overarching' framework of enquiry into the interrelationship of variable factors that singularly or in combination can have a critical bearing on the nation's capacity to pursue and sustain its perceived goals...... The dynamics of both internal and external factors and their copulative effect on both the \textit{state and power structure} is a matter of major strategic concern...In the context of Nepal, issues of national identity may form the initial focal point of enquiry"\footnote{"A Note from the Desk of the Chief Editor", \textit{Strategic Studies Series}, (Centre for Neapal and Asian Studies), No. 1, Autumn, 1984} (emphasis added).

The major findings of this brief survey may be summarised as follows. Strategic studies in the developed societies contribute greatly to the strategic thought process. National interests of these societies concern external and systemic security issues and the community of strategists are preoccupied with them. On the other hand, such studies in the developing societies either follow the Western tradition or do not have any specific focus. Despite some linkage of these organizations with the government, output used by the latter, however, is minimal for a variety of reasons. It is only recently and in a limited number of cases, strategic
studies organizations are concentrating on national issues. Even then, the major problems of poverty and socio-political under development are peripherally touched.

An Approach to Strategic Studies in the Third World

While the current trends of strategic studies in the developing societies indicate a state of flux, the fact remains that the enormous challenge that the Third World countries face needs a strategic approach and as such a new approach to strategic studies is required. The most formidable challenge is perhaps the enormous time gap. Most of the developed nation-states were built much before they were modernised and developed. The Third World transitional societies, however, are yet to solve the basic problems of state autonomy (vis-a-vis the hierarchical global power structure), establishing, a solid basis of nationalism and bringing the diverse ethnic, religious and linguistic groups within precise territorial borders. These problems of political and institutional underdevelopment are compounded by the structural problems of poverty, underdevelopment and social inequity. And these dual problems of poverty and political underdevelopment open up more formidable security fronts than the external sources of threats to security can pose—hunger, energy, protection of resources, social order, political stability and the like. To the extent security is endangered by external sources, it is questionable to what extent conventional military formations can check them. This adds to the set of challenges in terms of evolving appropriate security doctrines and security postures. The problems of the inner core on which depend the vitality or sustenance of these countries could therefore provide the conceptual orientation of strategic studies in the Third World countries.


35. For interesting empirical and analytical exposition, see Talukder Maniruzzaman, op. cit.
In contrast to the prevailing external or international orientations, the domestic content of strategic studies should be expanded manifold. The comprehension of the problems posed by the immense variety of forces requires mastery over the nuts-and-bolts in a variety of contexts that are not amenable to the sophisticated tools of analysis associated with the nuclear-issue-concerned strategic theorising.  

The premises on which the conceptual framework of strategic studies is to be posited are also required to be reconstructed. Much of conventional strategic analyses are based on the assumption of realism which considers realpolitik as an inescapable element of international politics. The realists are cautious and conservative in their estimate and accept status quo in international relations. For the developing and transitional societies, however, status quo is something antithetical and at the same time difficult to accept from a normative point of view. Nor is the environment of conflict and power struggle, as the realists take for granted, congenial for the progress of these countries. While the existing situation of grim poverty and socio-political underdevelopment has to be accepted as reality any serious analysis of the situation must also indulge in sort of optimising exercises to change situation in a normative fashion.

A second assumption of the traditional strategic studies is moral neutrality with which strategic analysis proceeds. Conventional strategy is concerned with the darker side of human beings in that it examines the way in which armed forces with the instrument of violence is used by the governments to pursue their interests. Its use determines not the question of right or wrong (ethical question, that is) but whose will is going to prevail. Such moral neutrality,

36. See Colin Gray, "The ‘Second Wave': Now Direction of Strategic Studies" RUSL
37. For an exposition of the assumptions of Western Strategic Studies, see Garneth, op. cit.
38. Ibid. pp. 90-12
like realism cannot be applied to the context of developing societies. The moral aspects of any strategy (adverse impact on the marginal groups or the downtrodden mass, for example) or any political measure must be resolved before initiating the strategy/measure.

A third assumption of strategic studies is the desirability of peace and security. Peace and security are, of course, universally desirable. What, however, is debatable is the strategy prescribed for attaining peace and security. Deterrence, disarmament, arms control, limited war, crisis management, all concern the attainment of peace and security. But the overall effect of attempting peace through these strategies is tantamount to supporting the status quo. Now, the developed societies have every reason to preserve the prevailing system. But for the underprivileged millions in Africa and Asia, to support *status quo* is to prop up the unequal system. While these deprived millions also have to care for peace, more than anything they have to care for social justice. And contemporary strategic thought is not much concerned with that. That again reinforces the argument that socioeconomic and political development could be the starting point of strategy.

NATION BUILDING PROBLEMS OF BANGLADESH AND STRATEGIC STUDIES

In the preceding section it has been argued that the major and basic problems of the developing countries require a strategic approach. This section concentrates on the nation building problems of Bangladesh and in the process makes an agenda of strategic studies. The most fundamental aspect of nation building is the creation of a sense of belongingness and a distinct national identity within a specific territorial boundary. Now for the individuals and constituent groups within a polity, it means economically, basic economic security, that is provision of at least basic human needs. In the overall context of scarcity and hierarchical social structure this

requires social equity in terms of minimising the gap between the rich and the poor, between centre and the rural periphery.\textsuperscript{40} Politically it means creating national and local institutions and participation of the constituent groups in the institutions, and more importantly, \textit{giving system value to the institutions and primacy of the constitution}. Socially, it means the most difficult engineering task: protecting the basic ethnic and religious cultural identity of different groups and class \textit{components} and at the sometime establishing an integral whole.\textsuperscript{41} These elements of nation building have been cogently put together by an Indian scholar. "Nation building in its truest sense has to ensure life and living to its citizens, fashion its economy, its politics, and culture in such a way as to ensure basic minimum."\textsuperscript{42} With this brief preliminary on nation building, the major nation building problems of Bangladesh and their strategic dimensions are outlined below. The basic objective is to raise issues as food for strategic thought rather than making a full-length discussion and policy prescription.

\textbf{Poverty, Underdevelopment and Social Inequity}

The most fundamental and pervasive nation building problem of Bangladesh is mass poverty which is enormous by any indicator—per capita GNP, nutritional intake, percentage of below subsistence

\textsuperscript{40} Centre-periphery paradigm is used in an extended fashion by Rajni Kothari. One important advantage of this conception is that it can capture the whole set of relationships between the metropole and the peripheral nations, between the rich and the poor, between urban modernized and rural backward sectors, between dominant and the subnational minority groups, all relevant to nation building task. See Kothari, "State Building in the Third World: Alternatives strategies", \textit{Politics, Administration and Change} (Dhaka), Vol. V (Jan-June) No. 1, 1980.

\textsuperscript{41} Indian political theorist V.R. Mehta argues for an "oceanic circle", an integral-pluralist system of wholes withing wholes. See Howard J. Wiarda, \textit{op. cit}, p. 439

population, lack of employment opportunities and access to (a) means of production, (b) economic and social opportunities/facilities. Land is the most important asset in Bangladesh and its ownership displays highly unequal pattern. Access to opportunities and facilities is crucial because the major initiatives and responsibility of undertaking development process lie with government. The relative economic condition of different classes and social groups is determined by relative access to these state-sponsored opportunities. This is where the political process impinge on the economic development process.

The problem is all the more compounded by ever increasing population on a tiny mass of land. By the turn of century, the population of the country will stand at no less than 150 million. The immediate question that should intrigue a strategist is to bring out the socio-political implications of massive poverty and population explosion and analyse how to ensure security from hunger and starvation for this vast population. It may also be argued that, as the production relations were kept almost in tact, all development strategies in the country helped the process of relative pauperisation, and polarisation of the relatively disadvanaged group. To many it may seem somewhat far-fetched that poverty may disrupt the internal social and political order, given the enormous coercive capability of the state and existence of some sort of anti-poverty programmes in the rural areas so as to prevent barely mass starvation. Maybe it is also somewhat simplistic to expect that massive poverty and marginalisation will automatically lead to social and political upheaval, as the Marxists claim. But it is also true that given very intricate linkages between and among different segments of the society and interest

44. See Faaland and Parkinson, "A Development Perspective for Bangladesh", op. cit. p. 50. The Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics projecttion, however, puts the figure at 140 million. See BBS, Bangladesh National Census, 1981.
groups (some of the linkages may be apparently inexplicable leftist movement taking on fundamentalist tinge, for example.) There are always many to articulate and utilise the explosive situation of the country. One may be reminded of the 1974 famine conditions of the country. The political stability of the country depends, so to speak, on the stability of prices of essential commodities, specially rice. And in the absence of continued electoral process, legitimacy and acceptability of the ruling regimes are also, at least partly, contingent on economic condition of the country in general and price situation in particular.

The long-term questions that should be raised are: what is the future of aid-dependent Bangladesh? What development strategy should Bangladesh follow? How could she break the so-called below poverty level equilibrium trap? More pertinently, how to activate the rather passive majority of the rising population? What went wrong with the previous development strategies? The role of strategist will be particularly relevant because compartmentalisation of economic development and political development may sometimes prove to be disastrous. On the other hand, integrative and linkage programmes can minimise the adverse consequences of lopsided development. Moreover, the chain impact of one sector, if so articulated, may contribute to the development of the other. For example, given the apparent stalemate at the national level over political development, one long term strategy could be starting at the grass-root. It has been argued that ensuring democratic participation of the common people in development programmes can lay the solid foundation of democratic institutions in the country.

45. For illustration of the concept, see Mohiuddin Alamgir, *Bangladesh: A Case of Below Poverty Level Equilibrium Trap* (Dhaka: Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies, 1978.)

46. Nearest and glowing example is the disintegration of Pakistan in 1971.

47. Somewhat similar arguments have been given by Milton Esman: "the tasks of nation-building and of developments is the bringing members of the national community into a network of relationships and institutions which enable them to participate actively in decisions affecting their individual and group welfare" Cited in K.M. Tipu Sultan, *Government and Citizen in Politics and Development: An Asian case* (Comilla: BARD, 1978.) p.20
Also multipurpose policies like economic participation or participatory development may contribute to the growth of functional politics in the country.

**Political Underdevelopment**

The second most important aspect in which strategic studies could engage is political development: how to evolve an acceptable political process through which legitimate and elected ruling authority may govern the country. Since independence, the country has been in the grip of continued instability leading to change of governments through bloody coups and counter-coups. And a point has now been reached where continued military rule can neither be accepted nor rejected because a viable alternative is not forthcoming. Here two realities may be mentioned. First, the traditional political process is getting out of order. It is sometimes claimed that the common people, who rose in a body in 1969 through 1971, have become apolitical. Probably that is not true. The reality is that the nature of problems have changed so much that the old order politics of slogan and rhetorics appear to be meaningless to the people. Disillusionment has begun to die hard in them but the political elites are perhaps yet to recognise it. Another important reason for the changed mood of the people is the growing extremism and violence in politics and social life.

The second reality is about the role and use of the armed forces. The situation has come to a point where the role of armed forces in national affairs should be critically scrutinised, debated at the national level and settled for ever. The questions that agitate the minds of the nation at the moment are: What should be the role of armed forces? Should the armed forces be given constitutional role? If so what should be the exact nature of that role? What should be the preconditions for their joining in civilian affairs? How can a healthy civil-military relations be engineered since the civilians are the largest chunk of the society and the military is the most powerful segment commanding the instrument of force? Like the question
of political order, these are very critical and intriguing questions. Strategic studies must investigate into the nature the cleavages. Are these basically pseudo and superstructural problems with the real problems lying beneath? Do the structural problems of poverty, lack of basic human needs and social inequity have any bearing on these conflicts? If they relate to the structural problems it would take long to resolve them. Pending such a solution, what could be the short-term strategy to manage the conflicts so that they no longer affect socio-political stability?

A different type of socio-political problem that Bangladesh faces at the moment is the crises in authority. It is very difficult to call it a short-term/transient problem because any observer of Bangladesh politics will agree that it has persisted since independence on an ever increasing scale. Withdrawal from organized politics has been accompanied by withdrawal from organized and lawful economic activities. Criminal sector of the economy has expanded in size. What is more, each criminal element seems to have curved out an autonomous zone for himself where law becomes either helpless unwillingly or collaborative. A bold brake is required before Bangladesh stands on the verge of anarchism.

National Integration

Bangladesh faces no serious problem of integration of minority or subnational groups into the national mainstream. The record of communal (religious) harmony in Bangladesh is excellent as compared to other countries of South Asia. Till recently she faced an insurgency problem with a segment of the tribal population. The genesis of the tribal insurgency, however, brings to the forefront the important issues of recognizing the legitimate rights of the tribal

48. The dailies and weeklies of Bangladesh these days carry stories of misappropriation and embezzlement of not thousands or lakhs but of crores of Taka, smuggling of hundreds of ounces of gold. Kidnapping and murder have become so commonplace that we seem to be learning to live with them.
minorities, straddling the border areas of Bangladesh. It may be argued away as a minor problem at the moment but as a potential problem spot it should be an area of careful observation and study.

The other kinds of integration problems that Bangladesh faces are integration of different classes, social, economic and professional groups which present a case of intense competition, power-struggle and lack of consensus. The causes of these inchoate scenario are both economic and political underdevelopment as mentioned earlier.

**Question of National Security**

Question of national security is a comprehensive and multifrontal issue and frontier security with conventional military formation is just one aspect, no less important though. While the importance of conventional defence preparedness has not decreased, the fact is that nature of international conflicts and sources of threats to security has changed. In military terms, most of them are of low-intensity conflict type. But in human and economic terms they may not be less vital. Resources security, food security, right to fishing, mining are some of the examples. Then there is the global struggle for that impinging on the national economy security. On the internal plane, intense power struggle between and among groups, civil war etc. are major sources of threats to security. How do we tackle these many frontal security problems? What should be our security postures and doctrines? "So there is no more a cogent base of strategic enquiry than to alert the nations to the nature and direction of perceived threat".

**SPECIFIC ROLE OF STRATEGIC STUDIES IN NATION BUILDING**

Like most other developing and unlike the developed countries, the strategic concerns of Bangladesh are not merely how best to attain the objectives given the resources because in most cases resources are not given, ends are not clearly defined. Given the state of Bangladesh society, a strategist has to be in continuous

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49. See Strategic Studies Series, op. cit.
search for where its national interests lie, how to reach a broad national consensus about its national goals and then take strategy one step back to find out how to generate resources for attaining those objectives. Understanding national needs and priorities, assessing strengths and weaknesses of nation building and estimating resources at the disposal of the nation—all require a good anchoring and a commanding height to have a telescopic view of problems and issues and to provide alternative solutions and direction.

The role of strategic studies suggested here may best be understood in terms of the linkage model at Figure I where strategic studies have been placed in a pivotal position. Specific roles include opinion building, monitoring, evaluating, providing policy inputs and conducting research with respect to the major aspects of Bangladesh’s national life and state structure, namely (a) the governments agencies, (b) pressure groups like the armed forces bureaucrats politicians, businessmen, students, (c) other interest groups. The figure shows how strategic studies can provide a powerful moderating impact on these groups through performing the above mentioned functions.

Policy Inputs

The primary task of strategic studies will be to carry out intensive research on vitally important national issues as indicated earlier to provide conceptualisation and approach to problems in terms of assumptions, objectives, priorities and definition of forces at work to policy planners, practitioners, scholars and academicians engaged in different aspects of national life. It should act as a ‘think tank’ to the government by providing policy inputs in terms of all conceivable alternatives with ramifications and implications leaving the choice of appropriate alternative with the policy makers. To be precise, the role of strategic studies will not be to carry out detail research in specific micro-problems like population policy, transport development or military strategy. Its role will
be to provide a higher level of integrative analysis where problems and issues may fall in their right places. As also is done by similar organizations like CSIS in Jakarta, CNAS in Nepal, basic national fields like national history, heritage, culture core national values, important foreign policy and security issues both internal and external, should come within the purview of strategic studies.
Monitoring, Evaluating, Anticipating and Forecasting

The moot point of strategic studies will be to obviate mistakes rather than rectifying them, to prevent conflicts rather than resolving them and to anticipate the destabilising forces within and without before they destabilise the society. Anticipating may be interpreted as 'looking beyond the in-basket', 'surfacing problems', 'scouting ahead', 'pre-auditing'. The basic task would be working out how present and immediate future developments may affect any policy and in turn, how present policies should take into account the future, considering the long range implications. This is a very important task that requires careful monitoring by having a finger on each and every nerve of the nation, at least on the potentially conflictual spots.

Crisis Management and Conflict Resolution

Political, economic and social crises and conflicts of interests are endemic in Bangladesh. One of the important task of strategic studies will be to analyse how to manage crisis and resolve conflicts. Experiences of many developing countries including Sri Lanka, India and Pakistan—three immediate neighbours of Bangladesh—show that crisis and conflicts escalate if they are not effectively managed. Experiences of various countries also show that violent means adopted for crisis management and conflict resolutions lead to aggravating the crisis. Therefore the approach should be non-violent. When the crisis extends beyond frontiers, effective diplomacy should be backed by proper public understanding of the issue and broad national consensus on the moves and postures.

Asking the Right Question

In the face of and aftermath of major crisis and events, the useful task of the academic strategist, is to ask the right question by way post-mortem analysis. Posing question is as important as finding answer in the problem-solving process because there is no point in providing the right answer to the wrong question and because the practitioners
are so busy finding the answers and ensuring implementation of these answers that they do not have the time to think. Moreover they are often blinkered or constrained by their experience so much that they lack the right type of questions, which often have to be critical. It is not alone the microscopic view but also a telescopic view that helps skimming the questions.

**Forum for Exchange of Views**

With a view to creating greater public understanding of issues of national importance and building up public opinion and consensus, strategic studies should provide forum for exchange of views from different walks of life through research publications, seminars, symposiums—on political, socio-economic and other issues. It can be an ideal forum where different interest groups including policy planners, civil and military bureaucracy, academician, politicians and social workers. Continuous series of dialogue could be initiated and the outcome carefully monitored and analysed.

**Platform for Launching New Policy Proposals**

Often it is not possible for government organizations to come out and experiment with new policy proposals because of lack of flexibility and sensitive public mind. Strategic studies organization many provide the base for launching new policy proposals and evaluating public opinion on them. In short, the strategic studies centres can be ideal 'nation building laboratory.'

**Coordination and Linkage in Research and Development**

Strategic studies should establish coordination and linkages with the academi community and intellectuals, with other research organizations and between researchers and professionals. From a position of *commanding height*, strategic studies may engage in prioritisation, linkages and bringing out the implication of different disciplines.

**CONCLUDING REMARKS**

With increasing number of strategic studies organizations coming out in both government departments, universities and private sectors,
many questions also have been raised as to their utility, methods and scope of their activities. In the first place it has been argued that the academic strategists are divorced from practical situations and as such, the solution they propose is either simplistic or too much complicated. Secondly, it has been pointed out that the practitioners have little time to go through the voluminous analyses of the strategists and in that case the policy-input role of strategic studies become meaningless. Presumably a third criticism could be that the agenda suggested for strategic studies might create overlapping with research pursuits in other disciplines like economics, sociology, political science, demography etc. Then questions might be raised: Who would be the strategists? What would be the status of the strategic studies organizations? What would be its relations with the government and similar other agencies—both autonomous and private?

Most of these questions are perhaps legitimate and interestingly they reflect the state of our society, dichotomy and compartmentalisation with very little feedback. Most of the academic research works in Bangladesh are carried out in vacuum without any feedback from practitioners, nor is there any appreciation of academic research. It is also true that there is great lacuna among the academicians to have greater cooperation with the practitioners.

As to overlapping, it may be emphasized that the unique advantage of strategic approach is that it can look at any particular issue from overall national perspective, locate it in proper framework and provide linkages. Viewed in this sense, strategic studies, can in fact, avoid overlapping and duplication which are prolific in developing countries like Bangladesh. Nor will strategic studies be an infringement on other fields of enquiry.