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NATIONAL SECURITY: BANGLADESH AND GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES

Abstract

The paper examines the present national and international geopolitical scenario from historical perspectives. The author attempts to show the relevance of different geopolitical concepts in the present day national and international politics that also impinge on the soft states like Bangladesh. Although political realism is the main grain of the paper, it, nonetheless, emphasises on the importance of soft power in managing the anarchical state of affairs of the world today. The paper purports to take one's attention to the strategies, like Multi-polarity, Reforming UN, Strengthening Regional Institutions, Resolving the Issues of Flashpoints, Multilateralism and Strengthening Normativity etc.

1. Introduction

Individual, national and inter-state security architecture is conditioned by different sets of assumptions, environment, geography, geopolitics, geo-economics, values, threats and capabilities of actors concerned to meet the impending or perceived challenges. Individual security, within the framework of a nation state, covers both human security, embracing the hierarchy of needs that an individual would deserve depending on his social, academic and economic status, and physical security both from within and without. This can be extrapolated to cover national security which

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involves government policy having as its objectives the creation of national and international political conditions favourable to the protection and extension of its core values or vital national interests. It falls within the realm of political realism, power politics, geopolitics, geostrategy or even geo-economics. Human security for its citizens can not also be precluded from the charter of existence of a nation-state. It might then become a part of the core values of a nation.

Further extrapolation of the security milieu can be made in the form of international security, where geopolitics plays a more penetrating role, which lacks a sovereign entity, remains in an anarchical state and, therefore, it is always in a state of flux. Deterrence concept, which is generally an enigma, takes over and action-reaction cycle is activated resulting in huge arms race. This is typical political realism or power politics. An increase in one state's security decreases the security of others. However, such scenario can be tackled by cooperative strategies. So, merely having a national security strategy may not work; there has to be a paradigm shift to put emphasis on international security in order to prevent greater damage. On top of this hierarchy, the idea of global security, which is intricately linked to international security, may also be proposed. It proposes a common set of principles and practices that guarantee the security of all nations. It is a universalistic approach to security. It is little utopian in idea but not undoable. However, in view of the nature of human beings and the existence of anarchical inter-state or geopolitical architecture, such concepts may not fructify but one can always aim for it. Merely aiming may provide a cooling effect on the environment.

Now it may be pertinent to show the relation of terms like geopolitics, geostrategy and geo-economics. These terms are very much related to power politics or political realism; some even call them ego-politics. The hard fact is hard power, which is related to geopolitics and ultimately prevails. Nonetheless, soft power, which cascades the hard power, can not be ignored. America is paying very high price for having preponderance only in hard power in Iraq and Afghanistan. Lately, they have realized it and there is a tendency towards encapsulating soft power also. The combined effect of hard power and soft power, called smart power, is a better prescription. If

national security is taken as an independent variable, then geostrategy may be called a dependent variable where geography and geopolitics work as mediating variables. Geopolitics may be defined as, “the relation of international political power to the geographical setting”.¹ However, there is a change in the tone and tenor of the term like geopolitics. It may now be seen differently from geopolitik. Geopolitics now tends to be categorized as a policy science, i.e. they seek to explore the structure of policy problems without necessarily prescribing particular courses of policy action. However, the basic and original essence of geopolitics is consideration of size, shape, location, and characteristics of nations with respect to one another. History is replete with examples of location and terrain. Poland, a nation sandwiched between two great powers but without any natural lines of defence suffered repeated invasions. On the other hand, Switzerland, because of its Alpine location apart from other considerations, maintained its neutrality and remained untouched militarily during different major wars.

Geostrategy is a subfield of geopolitics. As is true to any strategy, geostrategy is concerned with matching means to ends. Geostrategy calls for proactive strategies and provides a nationalistic tinge to it. Geostrategy can be called the merger of strategic considerations with geopolitical factors. It involves planning, assigning means for achieving national goals or securing resources of military or political importance. Geostrategy is the dynamic science of statecraft which establishes the link between geography and strategy.

Now, let us see the relevance of geo-economics in this regard. One school of thought tends to see geopolitics as a decaying analytical field and focuses on geo-economics as the central theme in envisioning the new world as it “purports to place international politics on an economic basis”. There is no denying of the fact that state-to-state relations are greatly actuated by economic compulsions. So, there is a tendency to divide the world on an economic footing viz., the US-led North America, Europe and China or Japan-led Asia. This definitely reflects the reality. However, one

¹ Cohen, S, *Geography and Politics in a Divided World*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1973, p.24

could be grossly wrong to assume that geopolitics and geo-economics are mutually exclusive; rather they converge in this age of interdependent globalization. One would not be wrong to deduce that the tools like protectionism, subsidy, quota system, imposing tariff, non-tariff or para-tariff barriers are directly related to geo-economics. In the long run, however, they fulfil the objectives of geopolitical ambition of a nation or a cluster of nations.

Given a broad understanding of different relations and their relevance, this paper attempts to explore the imperatives of international and national security, showing historical analogy, with emphasis on Bangladesh's security perspectives that fit into the overall scenario that would be broad but crosscutting and interactive. However, the paper would attempt to make the response realistic as seen from political realism as well as idealistic point of view.

2. An Overview of the Geopolitical Concepts in Different Periods and their Relevance

To start with, Mackinder's "Theory of Heartland" that identified the core of the Eurasian continent, placing greater emphasis on Eastern Europe, impacted on the critical events of history. Napoleon's failed attempt in 1812 and, again, Hitler's failed attempt in 1941-44 had shown the unassailability of the Heartland. Mackinder had rightly identified the critical mass or the centre of gravity, i.e. Eastern Europe where he had foreseen the titanic struggle between Germany and Soviet Union in the Second World War. Mackinder had also apprehended the alliance between these two great land powers that would be critical to two sea powers, i.e. USA and UK, and in order to counter such development, Mackinder proposed a "Mid land Ocean" alliance consisting of UK and USA, which would be on the victorious side in the Second World War. His theory has been criticized because of putting too much emphasis on geographical features and not taking into consideration the deployment of long-range bombers and nuclear weapons that subsequently emerged.²

² For details see, Geoffrey Sloan, "Sir Halford MacKinder: The Heartland Theory Then and Now," in Colin S. Gray and Geoffrey Sloan (eds.), *Geopolitics: Geography and Strategy*, Frank Cass, 1999, London, pp.15-38.

Almost during the same time Mahan in 1912, called for America to maintain a preponderant navy. He proposed an Anglo-American naval consortium, almost in line with Mackinder's "Midland Ocean" concept, as a basis for naval supremacy in the twentieth century and as a possible basis for the containment of an expansionist Russia.³ Again the strategists feared the military threat posed by Germany. Following these scholars, another American scholar that used to emphasise geopolitics, Nicholas Spykman (1893-1943), comes in the scene with a modern version of Mahan's quest for a realist American foreign policy on the basis of sea power. He propounded the principles of balance of power in the Old World, i.e. the Eastern Hemisphere. He urged upon America to keep the Old World divided through an active foreign policy. The idea was to maintain a balance of power in the Old World through alliances with weaker states against potential hegemons. Spykman called for controlling the Rimland consisting of Middle East, South and Southeast Asia and deduced that 'he, who controls the Rimland, would control the destinies of the world'. He also identified Soviet Union as the most dangerous candidate for expansion. He identified England, Germany and Japan as possible American allies in the balance of power strategy.

Kennan, the American diplomat in the Soviet Union, prior to the out break of the Cold War, sent the message to his home government to operationalize a "long-term, patient but firm and vigilant containment of Russian expansionist tendencies".⁴ This is famously known as the containment theory. The objective of the subsequent Cold War, fought between America and Soviet Union, was the containment of the Eurasian Power, i.e. Soviet Union. There is another way of looking at it. US strategies of containment since the Second World War have been largely aimed at the Rimland following Spykman's suggestion.

To put the above strategies in perspective what can be deduced is that their political and strategic objective was the Soviet Union who should not be allowed a free hand to shape up things in the Old

³ For details see, Jon Sumida, "Alfred Thayer Mahan, Geopolitician" in *Geopolitics, Geography and Strategy, op. cit.*, pp. 39-62.

⁴ John O' Loughlin (ed.), *Dictionary of Geopolitics*, Greenwood Press, London, 1994, p. 133.

World and to ensure that Germany and Soviet Union do not get united. Ever since the Cold War, America has persistently remained focused in the 'Selection and Maintenance of Aim'. Soviet Union got badly defeated in the Cold War and eventually got disintegrated. However, Soviet Union's power potential and resolve could not be defeated. Soviet Military's entry into Afghanistan and President Reagan's launching of Star Wars were the precipitous events for the disintegration of the Soviet Union. As a follow-up to the above strategies, America launched the Truman Doctrine⁵ along with the Marshall plan.

This resulted in the division of the world. The U.S. power established itself in the Eastern Mediterranean and backed reactionary, undemocratic regimes in Greece, Turkey and Iran. United States subsequently got involved in Korea, Vietnam, Lebanon, the Persian Gulf and Iran-Iraq War. Linked to Truman Doctrine, Marshall Plan was launched with the objective of simultaneously bolstering anti-communist political interests and open up Europe to U.S. capital. According to Truman, the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan are "two halves of the same walnut". The reconstruction of Germany was the core objective of the Marshall Plan which would work as a vital ally against the USSR to the east. The plan broadly succeeded in reconstructing European infrastructure and in integrating U.S. capital into Western Europe. It is also called the precursor to the European Economic Community.

Such an array of American geopolitical doctrines was met by world socialist society under the leadership of Soviet Union. What was surmised was that the sovereignty of individual socialist countries could not be counter posed to the interest of world socialism and the world revolutionary movement. World socialism, as a system, was indivisible and its defence was the responsibility of all communists. Leonid Brezhnev, whose ideas later came to be known as Brezhnev Doctrine, appeared more militant than the Chinese in intervening in Africa, Asia and Latin America to disrupt the capitalist order in the 1970s. However, Brezhnev played safe in

⁵ For details, see, Gear'oid O' Tuathail, Simon Dalby and Paul Routledge, *The Geopolitics Reader*, Routledge, London, 1998, pp. 58-60.

Middle East, which falls within the realm of shatter belt theory,⁶ where there was strong possibility of direct confrontation with the United States. The other spectrum of the Brezhnev Doctrine was putting down the Czech ambitions for independence in 1968 by the Red Army. It was proclaimed, as foreseen by Mackinder in his Heartland Theory, that the Soviet control of Eastern Europe was irreversible.⁷

Over here again the United States played safe since any disturbance in the Eastern Europe might predicate a general war. From a complete isolationist foreign policy in the Old World, America started stretching itself especially after the Second World War. America was badly mauled in the Vietnam War. Nixon Administration, therefore, started restructuring American foreign policy which came to be known as Nixon or Guam Doctrine. It felt the necessity for a Post-Vietnam retrenchment of American power from regional centres of power and accept *detente* implying reality of super power parity. It was acknowledged that either power was more than capable of completely destroying the other. One of the important fallouts of this Doctrine was the loss of Iran. Iran has now turned out to be Achilles' heel for the Americans. However, Reagan Doctrine, somewhat overshadowing the Nixon Doctrine played tough on the Russians. And it paid dividends in disintegrating the Soviet Union as already highlighted.

When American power was, somewhat decaying, Henry Kissinger played the fine game of diplomacy in order to create a wedge between the two great powers of the world. From 1969 to 1975, he extended the olive branch of *detente* to the Soviet, and rapprochement with China. He has been the architect behind the negotiated settlement to the Vietnam War and the break-up of Soviet-Egyptian friendship after the Yom Kippur War of 1973. In 1972, he won over China that was, among others, was designed to

⁶ Middle East has always been a region of strategic importance as it connects Eurasia and Africa. Middle East is a Shatter belt where maritime realm meets the continental realm; it is caught between colliding external political forces.

⁷ For details see, Gear'oid O' Tuathail, Simon Dalby and Paul Routledge, *op. cit.*, pp. 74-77.

reduce Soviet military pressure on West Europe. His balance of power game, thus, was superbly played.

Now some of the pertinent questions that can be raised are: what are the ground realities today? Is America, once again, overstretching? Are Russia, the successor state to the Soviet Union, and China again waking up? Are there enough reasons to believe that there are symptoms for another round of Cold War? How are the new alignments or power centres shaping up? Can we still see the application of Mackinder's Heartland theory, Spykman's, Shatter belt theory and Nixon Doctrine? How would the smaller countries, like Bangladesh, fit into such complex environment? How are the activities of the non-state actors impinging on the viability of the nation-states? Following is an attempt at exploring these and related questions.

3. The Present Day Context

The present day context is overwhelmed by the application of President Bush's 'Doctrine of Pre-emption' which gives America the *carte blanche* to attack any country, anytime and anywhere if it is considered a perceived threat, even without consulting the allies. The right of pre-emptive attacks runs counter to Article 5 of the UN Charter which provides one with the right to act in self-defence in case there is an actual attack; attacking proactively is not visualized. The Doctrine also calls for market based economic system apart from utilizing IMF and World Bank for furthering US goals. Getting control of the strategic energy resources, ensuring security of Israel, which has not honoured a single UN resolution, to eliminate the terrorists, especially the Al-Qaeda, and in a way encircle or engage Russia and China by courting allies around, following probably Spykman's suggestion, are some of the strategic objectives of America today.

America spends around US\$500 billion in defence which is more than next fifteen country's defence budget put together. America is already active in the strategic backyard of Russia by being involved militarily in Afghanistan, in Central Asia and in Pakistan. America has been seriously thinking, as reported in the press, of taking military action against Iran, for its alleged involvement in

nuclearization. This may push Iran to the embrace of Russia. America is planning to install radar stations or anti-missile defence system in Poland and Czechoslovakia which fall in the strategic backyard of Russia as, Heartland theory would suggest. The idea has been strongly resented by Russia who as a backlash has operationalized its strategic bomber aircraft patrol flights over the Pacific, Atlantic, Arctic Oceans, as well as Black Sea, suspended since the end of the Cold War, and showing its resolve to further refine and upgrade its missile capabilities. Russia's Navy has also resumed its military presence in the Mediterranean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean.

Militarily, America has got deeply entrenched in Iraq with unpredictable consequences. It is virtually impossible to predict how the war in Iraq would end and what would be its consequence for Iraq, the US and its allies in the region and elsewhere. America entered the country on wrong pretexts which have been accepted by most of the Americans. As a matter of fact terrorist activities have multiplied after the Americans entered Iraq and real democracy, as it seems, is a far cry in Iraq. The sympathy that was generated after 9/11 for America got evaporated after what America has done in Iraq. Terrorists have got further emboldened and they are in the process of regrouping in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The injustice done to the people of Palestine by Israel is being used by the terrorists as the *raison d'etre* for the multiplication of terrorism. Islam does not harbour terrorism or fanaticism. However, there are elements who misinterpret the tenets of Islam. Islam, however, does permit asking for justice for the right cause which is true in case of the followers of other faiths as well. Now, herein the geopolitical concept, given by Huntington, of 'clash of civilization' finds its relevance.

Huntington observes that the fault lines between civilizations are replacing the political and ideological boundaries of the Cold War as the flashpoints for crisis and bloodshed. Iron curtain has been replaced by velvet curtain of culture. Conflict along the fault line between Western and Islamic civilizations has been going on for 1300 years. And this would, as Huntington suggests, continue in the foreseeable future. The next world war, if there is one, will be a war

between civilizations which finds relevance to President Bush's recent statement made in respect of Iran.

Now, such developments call for serious scrutiny. If the fault lines between religions are intermingled with the geopolitical ambitions of the nations, then things might take a very complicated turn. The world would find it extremely difficult to wriggle out of this complexity. The suggestion would be: religious overtones should be minimized by the concerned powers in pursuit of their geopolitical objectives in the international arena. A question, however, may be asked: are the Americans deliberately propelling it to serve their national interests? Or, it is just a coincidence that the fields where they are operating to advance their geopolitical ambitions fall in the territories of the Islamic world like, Afghanistan, Central Asia, Pakistan, Iran, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Palestine. Interestingly, if developments in Iran, Balkans, Central Asia, Afghanistan, Poland and Czechoslovakia are judged from different perspective, then it points to the fact that America is trying to encircle Russia and when Japan, India, Australia are taken into consideration then it appears America is trying to encircle China. And there is no denying of the fact that both the powers are reasserting themselves to get a central place in world affairs. Russian Foreign Minister says emphatically, "Our partners should understand in our history we are going through a stage of inner concentration needed for another rise of the country".⁸ Fareed Zakaria's comments about the rise of China are clear cut, "The much heralded advent of China as a global power is no longer a forecast but a reality. On issue after issue, China has become the second most important country in the planet. From North Korea to Darfur to Iran, China has been slowly showing that it wants to be a responsible "stakeholder" in the international system".⁹

Now, America is embroiled in the Middle East, falls part of the Shatter belt theory, in the Eastern Europe and Central Asia that points to the Heartland Theory, and in the Asia Pacific that can be

⁸ Sargey Lavrov, "The Foreign Policy of Russia: A New Phase", *Russian Digest*, December 2007, Vol. 3, Embassy of the Russian Federation in the People's Republic of Bangladesh, p.7.

⁹ Fareed Zakaria, "The Rise of a Fierce yet Fragile Superpower", *Newsweek*, December 31, 2007/ January 7, 2008.

called part of Rimland theory propounded by Spykman. US State Department declared Western African oil a “strategic national interest”. The US National Intelligence Council (NIC) predicts, Gulf of Guinea will supply 20-25% of total US imports by 2020. America is, reportedly, considering opening a separate military command in Africa. Both Huntington and Paul Kennedy have called these “imperial overstretch” by America. Can America really manage so many fronts together all by itself, since America is finding difficulties in sustaining committed allies except Great Britain? It is, reportedly, known that NATO troops are reluctant to go for offensive actions against the Taliban in Afghanistan. As a consequence America is beefing up the combat forces in Afghanistan. In all likelihood, America should have taken some kind of military action against Iran, given the rhetoric coming from the Americans. By now, the Russians and the Chinese have got involved in Iran. They have developed certain stakes in that country. Is it because of the Russians and the Chinese that America is giving a second thought regarding military action against Iran, while giving diplomacy a chance?

Again the Chinese and the Russians have formed a geopolitical entity called Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) presumably to offset the American influence in Central Asia. Americans, as reported, had to abandon some of their military projects in Central Asia. America is building its military armada in the Indian Ocean and Pacific Ocean in collaboration with Japan, India and Australia to probably checkmate the Chinese in the Asia Pacific. Recent naval exercise in the Bay of Bengal, close to the Andaman, consisting of ships coming from the US, India, Australia, and Singapore is a testimony to such a strategy. America is likely to get militarily involved along with Japan, in case China tries to unify Taiwan through military means. Again, China would not compromise on this sensitive issue, even if it has to use its military wherewithal. It is learnt that America is planning to develop a conglomerate of hundreds of naval ships in the Pacific. Apparently America is again applying Spykman’s suggestions’ to keep the Old World divided.

America is, no doubt, called a sole superpower. People, at times, even brand it as hyper power. Brzezinski makes a forecast that America would continue to be the sole superpower in this Century also. Fareed Zakaria also holds similar view. But both Huntington

and Paul Kennedy think America may come down in its ranking. America is, no doubt, overstretched. Its economy is in recession. Its image has been badly tarnished. Chu Shulong, a highly regarded specialist on the United States writes, "The U.S. is not in decline. Its basic conditions are healthy and dynamic". Yet Chu adds an important caveat: the "U.S. has lost its prestige or soft power".¹⁰ It is tackling too many objectives at a time including the non-state actors in every nook and corner of the world. "... the rest of the world has looked on and seen the most powerful nation in human history acting like a caged animal, lashing out at any and every constraint on its actions".¹¹ It has already sunk over US\$500 billions in Iraq war without any tangible result as yet.¹² Madeline Albright, comparing the Vietnam and the Iraq wars, aptly noted, "America's strength has become an encumbrance".¹³

According to a projection by the renowned Wall Street firm Goldman Sachs, China's economy is likely to be larger than the US economy by 2041.¹⁴ Both the powers are upgrading their military and are having extensive military cooperation that range from technology transfer to combined forces exercise. America, however, might exploit the contradictions that exist between Russia and China as it did in 1972 when Kissinger played the subtle diplomatic game to win over China. It carries sense since Russia, as yet, has not transferred its most formidable arms to China.

Be that as it may, both Russia and China are posing certain degree of threats to America's interests. Every thing may not go unchallenged as it has been going on since the end of the Cold War.

¹⁰ Quoted in Minxin Pei, "An Unlikely New Ally", *Newsweek*, Special Edition, Special Issues, 2008.

¹¹ Fareed Zakaria, "The Fearful Superpower", *Newsweek*, Special Edition Issues, 2008.

¹² See, The War in Iraq Costs, URL: http://www.nationalpriorities.org/costofwar_home accessed March 15, 2008.

¹³ Quoted in, Sargey Lavrov, *op. cit.*, p.8.

¹⁴ Goldman Sachs, Global Economic Paper No.134: *How Solid are the BRICS*, URL: http://www2.goldmansachs.com/hkchina/insight/research/pdf/BRICs_3_12-1-05.pdf accessed March 13, 2008

From the military point of view, America has to maintain a very long line of communication to sustain itself in another hemisphere. From the same perspective, both Russia and China have an inherent advantage. America has the advantage of the alliance of Japan, Australia, India, South Korea and it has also recently wooed over Germany and France to its side. Again if Shanghai Cooperation Organization grows stronger and more integrated then things may not bode well for America.

Now, therefore, a pertinent question may be raised: will America resort to Nixon type Doctrine as it did after the Vietnam War? Rumours are agog that America is looking for an exit strategy from Iraq although certain quarters totally negate such a possibility. But the moot point is: it is extremely difficult and expensive to sustain such a huge military machine, in a fighting mode, for such prolonged period of time in a distant land. It is even difficult to sustain the motivation and morale of the troops which would be true to any military. America is fighting a fleeting enemy (the non-state actors) which is, according to military parlance, ten times more risky and costlier. It is true both for Iraq and Afghanistan. At the moment things are looking little better in Iraq but such war has its own dynamics and cycle which might go haywire again anytime.

Given the realities in the ground and economy, obviously under strain, America will have to go for outsourcing somewhat similar to what was stipulated in the Nixon Doctrine. America will have to look for allies to sustain its war effort. However, allies are available generally for logistics and moral support but asking for sacrificing soldiers, for a cause not directly protecting one's own interest, is a difficult proposition. America has won over Germany and France especially few years after the outbreak of Iraq War, but their direct contribution in military operations anywhere in the world, if it does not entail their national interests, may be discounted. However, America will have to depend on EU for many reasons, including taking care of European security in collaboration with NATO. It may have to outsource to India to take care of South Asia and in an implied way to checkmate China. America is having alliance relationship with Japan, with America taking the sword and Japan the shield, to, again, contain China. Here, the Australian inputs are also relevant. In the Middle East, America had earlier neutralized

Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states. Saudi Arabia is presumably geared to challenge Iran. Regional arrangements are palpable in the form of some kind of regional arrangements or outsourcing some of America's responsibilities. Regional security environment may be actuated by regional powers under the direct aegis and technological and military support of the Americans.

Given this development, South Asia will have two giants one poised against the other, to play and check the game plan of the Americans. However, India is a mature democracy having very seasoned leadership who may not totally tow the line of the Americans. But when it comes to containing China or Pakistan, or dealing with other smaller nations of South Asia, India will have to give its best. Otherwise India's prestige as a preponderant power, at least in South Asia, will be at stake. India, very much, wants to be an Asian power. It has acquired nuclear power to demand such a status. America has already granted such a status to India by signing the Civilian Nuclear Deal with India, although the Deal is under strain at the moment due to internal political dynamics of India.

4. Bangladesh in the Context

China and India, therefore, clearly comes out in the regional environment who can call shots in the power political game. Geo-economics also gets linked up. Their economies are booming which are fast overshadowing the regional economies. These two economic powerhouses are even quietly but forcefully competing with the economies of the developed countries and, more importantly, bridging the gap between the size of the economies of China and India, on the one hand, and that of the developed economies, on the other. India is poised to emerge as the world's third largest economy by the year 2032, while China's economy is to be larger than the US economy by 2041.¹⁵ In addition, China and India are pursuing massive military, nuclear and space technology modernization. These two giants are also coming closer to settle their conflicts and having more economic cooperation. Inter-state trade has ballooned. However, all these do not stop them from acquiring state of the art ICBMs or nuclear powered submarines or world class fighter

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

bombers. Both nations' defence budgets are growing by leaps and bounds. Indian defence budget is closing to US\$50 billion when the Chinese, as the American claim, is close to US\$100 billion.

The strategic manoeuvres by both the nations are on. Each one of them is trying to court allies in the environment. However, both the actors are playing a very mature and balanced game of geopolitics. Now Bangladesh has to fit into this geopolitics, keeping its national interests above everything else. Bangladesh can not remain timid, nor should it get sidelined, or sandwiched. It has to play a fine game of balancing if it has to survive as a self-respecting nation. Bangladesh is already overwhelmed by innumerable internal problems which are considerably affecting its human security. All these also have their ramifications externally. Bangladesh has too many people living in too little a space. It has very few comparative advantages. It is plagued by misgovernance, corruption and trans-national crimes. Political instability is crippling this otherwise potential country. Its abundant manpower, although a liability, can easily be turned into human resources and be exported for more remittances. This year it has earned US\$6.4 billion in remittances which, according to the World Bank, can be increased to US\$15 billion by the year 2015. As a matter of fact this remittance earning is greatly sustaining its already fragile economy. This year's acute shortage of foodstuff, caused mainly by natural disasters, is being refilled by importing food at a very high price. This could not have been possible without having enough foreign currency reserves. However, deficit financing is also increasing hugely.

Another crisis that looms large in the horizon is the energy crisis in Bangladesh. The present proven gas reserves may get depleted soon unless new reserves are discovered or make the prudent use of coal as an alternative source of energy. Food shortage multiplied by energy shortage and skyrocketing of its price in the international market and other trans-national events like climate change due to sea-level rise, cyclonic storms, tidal bores, floods, trans-national terrorism, spread of infectious diseases, like avian flue, AIDS, corruption in every strata of society and so on may make life in Bangladesh more miserable in not-too-distant a future. Just to cite an example, that touches the tip of an iceberg in terms of damage wrought by the natural disaster, the recent avian flue in Bangladesh

has done damage to the tune of Taka 40 billion to its economy. One can then well imagine the damage caused by the cyclonic storm SIDR that hit the entire south western part of Bangladesh. Bangladesh's trade imbalances both with China and India are monumental to the tune of billions of US dollars. Bangladesh has to take corrective measures to ward off the overwhelming effects of these two giant economies. Bangladesh has to look to the EU, the Middle East, the US, Southeast Asia and Japan to ward off from being engulfed.

Its economy is undergoing a difficult period, due to the skyrocketing prices of essentials, like fuel and food. Its politics is in limbo mainly due to confrontational political culture, bureaucracy is not-so-efficient, public universities are not delivering as expected and corruption is corroding the social fabric of the nation. If such state of affairs continues, Bangladesh's existence, as a viable country, may be problematic. However, some kind of institution building has started which is quite encouraging. Bangladesh has to crystallize its national objectives for at least next 10-15 years and start implementing its perspective plan. Bangladesh may not fall prey to the geopolitical and geo-economic objectives of the great powers, both regional and extra-regional. It has to distance itself deftly but still derive maximum from the giants and others. Geostrategic location of Bangladesh may tempt the regional or extra regional powers to meddle in the affairs of Bangladesh. Bangladesh may commit a blunder if it allows such meddling by the foreign powers.

Bangladesh's polity, economy, bureaucracy, education, health and the spectre of calamities, and so on are in such a state that any wrong move in the international arena may bring disaster for the country. Bangladesh is already a soft state. This got further exacerbated by the natural disasters that befell this unfortunate land recently. Politicians could not live up to the expectations of the people, but again politics may not be abandoned because grass root connection is obligatory for the effective governance of the country. It, therefore, boils down to the fact that Bangladesh's internal policies and external dynamics of relations have got intricately mixed. Is this a critical scenario? If so, only a competent, visionary and knowledgeable leadership functioning within a legitimate political process can face the challenges of the time.

5. Response

Firstly, leaning towards multi-polarity could balance out the chaotic state that the world is in today. And this multi-polarity implies both at the regional and international levels. However, along with the multi-polarity, efforts should be geared to sort out the flashpoints.

Secondly, in order to settle the issues of flashpoints, UN needs to be reformed to make it more effective. It needs to be made more representative to give way to the newly emergent economic and military powers who do, otherwise, call shots. Reform options are available from where one of them should be agreed upon by the veto wielding powers.

Thirdly, along with the UN, regional institutions also need to be strengthened to take charge of the regional issues. However, care should be taken not to give rise to regional hegemony. EU could be a good model for others to emulate. The New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD), strongly backed by South Africa, has moved beyond Westphalian sovereignty, by peer review mechanism, is encompassing areas of peace and stability, political governance, and economic and corporate governance. African Union (AU) is also coming out as a good model followed by ASEAN wherein ARF is playing a significant role in getting the powers in constructive engagement. SAARC, however, is far from being moving towards such a direction. In South Asia, political and economic interactions are not yet propitious for this. But South Asia can not afford to sit back when other regional organizations are moving forward with increasing momentum, be it geopolitics, security, counter terrorism, resolving disputes, bi-lateral or multilateral issues, economic integration, encouraging democratic dispensation etc. Both China and India are embroiled in the geopolitical game, but still they are moving forward for resolving the outstanding contentious issues and increasing mutually beneficial economic cooperation. Smaller states of South Asia should constantly keep the two giants engaged in creating a harmonious environment where economics, culture and people-to-people contacts would overshadow the geopolitical ambitions. Engagement and balancing would be two good options

for the smaller nations of South Asia. These are especially applicable for Bangladesh.

Fourthly, Confidence Building Measures (CBMs), both at the international and regional levels, should be revitalized under the aegis of revamped UN and other regional organizations. State-to-state CBMs should also be pursued in right earnest by the actors concerned.

Fifthly, America, though called a super/hyper power, can not sort out all the outstanding issues of the world by itself. The US earnestly needs collaboration with the great powers, like Russia, China, India, France, Germany and Japan in order to deal with the flashpoints, like Palestine, Taiwan, Kashmir, Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, Balkans etc. Many powers may not agree to handle some of the flashpoints overtly, but quite or behind-the-scene diplomacy can always take care of those. Any drift towards further deterioration of situation in any or a number of flashpoints as listed above would make the world more unsafe. It would be wise for America to pass on some of the responsibilities gradually to the reformed UN. This would lead the world towards better stability and make it safer. This would also be in the interests of America in the long run. America may now seriously think of re-energising its soft power which is likely to give it more dividends. This will make America even greater. According to Fareed Zakaria, in a new global survey, most nations polled believed that China would act more responsibly in the world than the United States. It isn't that America is too strong, but that it is seen as too arrogant and insensitive. "The United States is seen as arrogant and aloof, protective of its power but unable to use it wisely. It talks tough but refuses to work with allies or meet with leaders it doesn't like. This undermines America's ability to lead, to drive wedges between its adversaries and to negotiate settlements to protracted problems".¹⁶ Such an image can not be conducive to even the long-standing interests of the US.

Sixthly, strengthening normativity in all international relations should be emphasized. Multi-polarity in normative aspects would be more meaningful than the strategic multi-polarity at least for the time

¹⁶ Barack Obama, "The Need for a New Face", *Newsweek*, Special Edition Issues, 2008.

being. Diplomacy, values, ethics, democracy, human rights, adhering to the UN Charter and Geneva Conventions, and dispensing justice should be the way forward.

Seventhly, to counter terrorism, the international community should address the legitimate political grievances and aspirations of marginalised groups, coupled with intelligence-led counter terrorism police action against violent groups and open dialogue with terrorist leaderships. UN and other regional organizations should be involved whenever possible. This again brings to the fore the point of addressing the flashpoints.

Eighthly, the smaller states, for their sustenance and survivability should pursue multilateralism. Even if multi-polarity comes back, as was the case during the pre-World War II period, smaller countries like Bangladesh have to explore all avenues to derive maximum. Energy crisis, food shortage, trans-national crimes, internal political instability, volatility in the behaviour of climate, population burden etc. are going to pose formidable challenges.

6. Concluding Remarks

There is no 'End of History'. The basic tenets and dictates of history probably come back over and over again to transform the destinies of the nations and their people. Basic realities and nature of power politics hardly undergo changes. It may change the actors' alignment, given their interests at that point in time. But the interests reign supreme. However, interests may cover a very wide spectrum ranging from leadership/policing role to control over resources to preserving one's ideologies and convictions. Creation of nation-states especially after the Second World War developed a pattern of inter-state relations where anarchic situation was palpable. After the Cold War, with the disintegration of the Soviet Union, it was thought that the uni-polarity and triumph of democracy would bring about stability, and peaceful world environment would prevail. This did not happen due to the outbreak of ethnic and religious conflicts in different parts of the world. Non-state-actors took over the world stage of politics. America reacted to it with its full might. If a force is not resisted at any stage, it gets further momentum which might rupture the system. Fault line in the system may cause it to

malfunction. Unilateralism has taken control even at the cost of efficacy and relevance of the United Nations. Trans-national crimes are challenging the viability of the nation-states. The evolving scenario is complex. It is moving towards multi-polarity with elusive non-state-actors complicating the scenario with serious consequences. In pursuit of their interests, soft power may now be given greater consideration by all the concerned stakeholders.