EVOLVING REGIONAL SECURITY LANDSCAPE OF THE ASIA- PACIFIC

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General

The Asia-Pacific region, typically covering much of East Asia, South Asia, Southeast Asia, and Oceania, includes a number of nations and a huge population with mosaics of ethnicity, language, culture, traditions and colourful histories. In recent times the region has undergone significant changes in terms of regional security structure, political and economic cooperation & development. These growing economic and political pre-eminence coupled with complex dynamics of international relations and regional politico-economic intricacies have definitely caused certain security concerns in the region. The potential security landscape sprouting in the region should be viewed with this backdrop.

The Evolving Regional Security Order

The security order in the Asia-pacific is in a flux. The emergence of new regional cum global actors with increasing economic and political influences has reshaped the regional security landscape of the region to a great extent. Traditionally, the USA has long maintained permanence in the region and also pronounced every intention of maintaining its leading role with its 'rebalancing' or 'pivot' foreign policy to Asia. On the other hand, China is a vital economic partner to many in the region and the countries like Russia, Japan, India, Australia and South Korea have also maintained effective economic and military relationship with many. In this evolving scenario, how to maintain a pragmatic balance between the thriving countries has become a rational concern. Hence, the regional countries caught in this paradoxical ball game surely have to play smart. The last thing is expected

however, is the development of a cold-war like scenario or confrontational politics between these key actors or others, which, definitely would be extremely detrimental to all in the region.

The Korean Peninsula: Critical North–South Dynamics

There is no denying the fact that Korean Peninsula is a significant hotspot in the region. The relations between South and North Korea have often swung like pendulum from tentative cooperation to near-conflict situation. The threats of pre-emptive conventional and nuclear attacks has always clouded the security landscape of the region. Particularly the nuclear issue is a great concern for all. Moreover, the probable proliferation of nuclear arsenal and long range missile technology is also a point of worry. The perceived tug of war between the great powers and their strategic alliances with North and South Korea remain as the cornerstone in this regard.

Maritime Security: Trade and Energy Flow and Boundary Delimitation

Over the years, the region has transformed into a centre of gravity for global trade and energy flow. The strategic location of the Indian and Pacific oceans along with the Bay of Bengal and the Malacca, Sunda and Lombok straits- the great pathways for shipping of essential trade and energy has underscored the energy security as a critical kingpin in the security conundrum. Hence, energy security has become a key feature in the security landscape of the region. At the same time, the rise of non-military threats such as illegal arm smuggling and piracy in the maritime domain have further complicated the maritime scenario. Furthermore, the dispute over maritime boundary delimitation and on ownership of vital islands or sea areas will essentially endure as the bone of contentions among the littorals. The growing competitions to exert influence over disputed areas and the concurrent rapid growth of naval capacity building by the concerned countries will have significant security implications in the region.

Non-Traditional Security Threats: The Climate Change

In non-traditional security parlance, the climate change issue coupled with natural calamities are particularly becoming worrisome, particularly for the developing countries like Bangladesh. The unwarranted sea-level rise may pose serious threat in the availability of food, water, health and shelter. The subsequent loss of livelihood, assets and displacement may lead to economic deprivation and lower quality of life for the affected group of people. Although, resilient people of countries like Bangladesh, are constantly trying to adapt and cope with the changing climate scenario, but it is not the permanent solution. Particularly, in light of the fact that the Indian Ocean is now storing 70% of heat stored by global oceans in the previous decade, need a serious look into this issue.

Refugee Crisis

More than '400-thousand' refugees from Myanmar, had scrambled across the Bangladesh border very recently to escape alleged extrajudicial killings, torcher, rape and arson attacks. The latest influx of displaced people took the total number of refugee in Bangladesh heading towards about one million. In fact, Bangladesh is struggling to provide humanitarian assistance to these refugees, most of whom are women and children. In this backdrop, Honourable Prime Minister of Bangladesh Sheikh Hasina, reiterate that the Bangladeshi government would do the best to continue to render humanitarian support to these refugees, but that Myanmar needed to "take steps to take their nationals back to their own homeland".

It is also to be noted here that the sense of deprivation and marginalisation often breed radicalism. Seemingly, the huge number of refugees particularly hosted in Bangladesh, remain vulnerable to indoctrination and recruitment by radical groups, which was also duly indicated by the Advisory Commission led by Mr Kofi Annan. This will not only affect national security of Bangladesh or Myanmar but surely would have serious implications on enduring peace in the region. Necessary regional and international efforts are urgently essential to solve this humanitarian crisis immediately and albeit permanently.

Terrorism: Bangladesh Experience

There is no denying the fact that, the rise of terrorism has evolved as the greatest threats to democracy, economic development and pose perilous challenges to national, regional and international peace. This international phenomena is also equally affecting regional country like Bangladesh.

Bangladesh however, is not and never was a breeding ground for terrorist, rather according to many, it is a spill-over effect of the middle-east crisis, Afghan war, Iraq War and other extra regional factors. In recent years, Bangladesh experienced number of sporadic terrorist activities in public places. Especially, the much talked about 1st July 2016 terrorist attack in a Dhaka restaurant, was a heinous blow against humanity and social harmony of Bangladesh.

Counter Terrorism: Bangladesh Perspective

The government of Bangladesh, under the able leadership of Honourable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, is following a "zero tolerance" policy against terrorism. Bangladesh pursues a value driven foreign policy as articulated by the Father of the Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, who proved the outlook of "friendship to all and malice to none". This unique maxim also inter-alia promotes peace, democracy, communal harmony, human rights, good governance and social justice to combat violent extremism and fundamentalism.

Internationally, Bangladesh is party to all the universal anti-terrorism instruments. The Government of Bangladesh supports the implementation of the UN Security Council Resolutions 2170 and 2178; in prevention of entry, transit, recruitment, organizing, transporting, financing and equipping of foreign terrorist fighters activities.
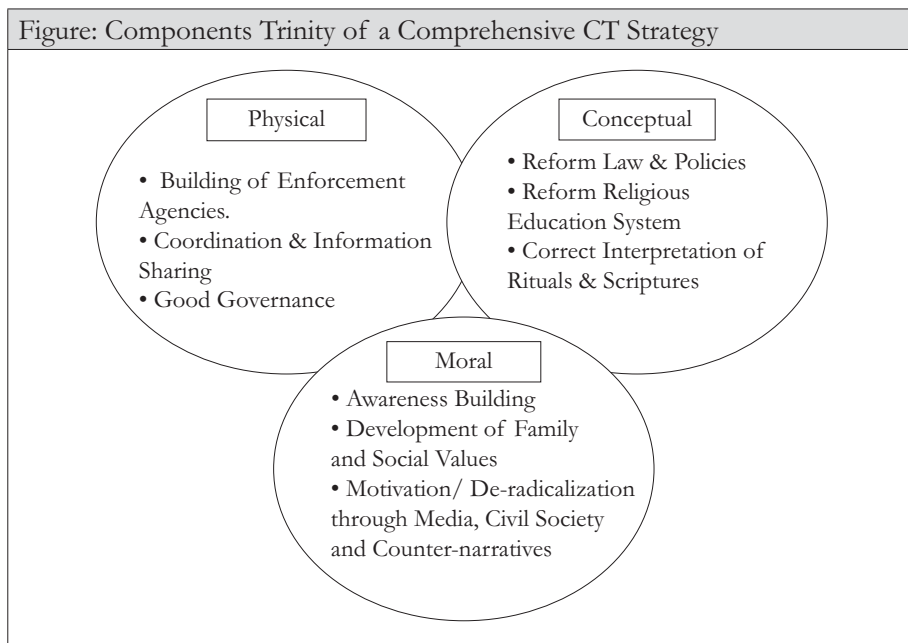
At the national level, Bangladesh has developed a robust legal, regulatory and institutional regime to combat terrorism. The Government has promulgated the Anti-Terrorism Act - 2009 (further amended in 2012 and 2013), and Anti-Terrorism Rules – 2013. Alongside, the Government has also promulgated Money Laundering Prevention Act - 2012, which includes among others, terrorism and terrorist financing.

In domestic realm, the Government of Bangladesh has already banned several terrorists' outfits and groups. Many of the perpetrators of bombing incidents

including their kingpins were tried and convicted. The Government is also working on further capacity building of the relevant law enforcement agencies to effectively combat transnational terrorism, organized crimes, and violent extremism.

Counter Terrorism: Way Forward

Bangladesh recognizes the necessity of a holistic approach involving all the national and regional stakeholders to eradicate terrorism from the region. Thus, an all-inclusive and a comprehensive approach to counter-terrorism and radicalization is required to meet the challenges posed by contemporary extremist and terrorist groups. This would demand de-radicalization programmes, involving the active participation of educational institutions, law enforcement authorities, the media and the civil society. A comprehensive counter-terrorism (CT) strategy may essentially encompass conceptual, physical and the moral components as follows:

Figure: Components Trinity of a Comprehensive CT Strategy

Physical
• Building of Enforcement Agencies.
• Coordination & Information Sharing
• Good Governance

Conceptual
• Reform Law & Policies
• Reform Religious Education System
• Correct Interpretation of Rituals & Scriptures

Moral
• Awareness Building
• Development of Family and Social Values
• Motivation/ De-radicalization through Media, Civil Society and Counter-narratives

Looking Ahead: Crystal Gazing

Securing cyber space will pose serious security challenges in future. The recent 101 million dollar money transfer scam from Bangladesh Bank to the Philippines and Sri Lanka has showed us the rogue nature of the cyber-attacks even during peace time. Side by side looming competitions on controlling outer space is surely going to occupy the future security parlance. The Fourth Industrial Revolution builds on the Digital Revolution marked by phenomenal technological breakthroughs in robotics, artificial intelligence (AI), nano-technology, quantum computing, biotechnology, etc will have great potential to continue to extraordinarily expand the people to people connectivity & lifestyle changes. On the other hand these would also create new-fangled security concerns. We need to be very smart in mastering and managing the Fourth Industrial Revolution, which will be exceedingly challenging.

Author

Lieutenant General Chowdhury Hasan Sarwardy, BB, SBP, BSP, ndc, psc, PhD is the Commandant of National Defence College, Bangladesh. He was commissioned in the Corps of Infantry on 15 June 1980. In his glorious military career, he has fine mixed of command, staff and instructional appointment. He commanded Infantry Battalion, 1st Bangladesh Battalion (which trains the cadets of Bangladesh Military Academy), Rifles Battalion, Rifles Sector, Infantry Brigade, Bangladesh Ansar and Village Defence Party, Special Security Forces, Logistics Area, Infantry Division and Army Training and Doctrine Command. As staff he served as General Staff Officer, Grade-1 in Formation and Army Headquarters, Director Operations in Border Guard Bangladesh and Director Military Intelligence in Army Headquarters. As instructor he conducted training in Switzerland, United States and Nepal on United Nations affairs. He was the Founding Member and Chief Instructor of both Non Commissioned Officers' Academy and Bangladesh Institute of Peace Support Operations Training. He also served in Mozambique as United Nations Military Observer and Chief of Operations of Bangladesh Contingent in Sierra Leone. He was the Vice Chancellor of Bangladesh University of Professionals.

The General is a graduate of Defence Services Command and Staff College and National Defence College, Bangladesh. He also obtained LLB degree and Master's degrees in Defense Studies, Security Studies, Political Science and Business Administration. He has successfully completed PhD degree from Bangladesh University of Professionals.

General Hasan received gallantry award 'Bir Bikrom' for displaying unfathomable courage in counter insurgency operations. His contribution in Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord on December 2, 1997 is worth mentioning. He led the rescue operations of Tazreen Garments, Savar on December 2012 and Rana Plaza, Savar on April 2013. For these rescue operations he received the coveted 'Senabahini Padak', which is the highest non-operational award in Bangladesh Army. He was also the architect of two Guinness World Record making events of Bangladesh; 'Largest Human Flag on 16 December 2013' and "Most People Singing National Anthem Simultaneously" on 26 March 2014. On this field he received the coveted 'Bishisto Seba Padak', which is also another non-operational award in Bangladesh Army.