

MYANMAR'S STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES IN THE 21ST CENTURY: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BANGLADESH

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INTRODUCTION

Resource-rich Myanmar is strategically located between three regions, i.e., South Asia, South East Asia, and East Asia, with Asian rising economic power China and India in the northern side while vibrant regional economy Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) in the southern side. Strategically, China needs secured energy trade routes as an alternate to the Malacca strait and gain access to the energy resources for the development of regions contiguous to Myanmar. Studies may reveal likely shift for the interest in energy link between Myanmar and India, bypassing Bangladesh, could be of strategic relevance for India looking at rising big-power in East Asia. Studies may also reveal how ASEAN would benefit from Myanmar with policies of engagement. Understandably, Myanmar would benefit more by giving access to its abundant energy resources because such access would enable it to develop economically and sustain politically. What could be of more significance to isolated Myanmar, which, being a socialist country under a self-styled military dictatorship, to be under China's sympathetic protection! On the added note, there would be certain far-reaching implications, if Myanmar, by creating a strategic link to adventure with nuclear energy in the name of using it for peace-time applications, gets access to another isolated country North Korea. If authenticated, studies on Myanmar to achieve nuclear deterrence may reveal something of more significance and may seriously implicate Bangladesh. Nevertheless, there is strong probability to find that China and India are already economically engaged with Myanmar. The facts-finding study may reveal that in this era of economic interdependency, be it a democratic government, autocratic regime or a regime with controlled democracy, the regional powers or the big power would race to set foot in Myanmar as long as it kills Myanmar's hunger for development and their thirst for energy and security.

Research Questions

Therefore, subsequent research questions may appear pertinent. Firstly, what are the factors that would be instrumental for Myanmar to define its strategic objectives in the 21st century? Secondly, could the power to achieve a credible strategic deterrence by 2020 be the main theme of strategic objectives for Myanmar? Thirdly, how Bangladesh would respond to the implications for Myanmar's strategic objectives in the 21st century?

Scope

In the scope of this paper, country's history would be analyzed to reveal 'periodic behavior continuities' of the pasts and argue its relevance in this era. Visualizing that behavior, Myanmar's concept in developing bilateral relationship interests in the past decade of 21st century with the rising powers in its neighborhood, regional association and global powers, and countries of special, would be analyzed. Facts would then be deduced to understand the prevailing compulsions and commonalities. Thus, to visualize the strategic objectives, arguments would anticipate the strategic effects in Myanmar by the next decade in this century and then short list the implications for Bangladesh limited to the responds only.

Historical Significance of GEO-Strategic Location

Geo-strategic Location

Referred as 'resources-rich country', Myanmar's geographical location is between two Asian rising powers in the north, the rich economic region ASEAN in the south and the Bay of Arakan with energy resources. All these states pursue a strategy of fostering regional stability and securing economic advantages, while refraining from open criticism to the country's domestic policy stance.¹ Therefore, Myanmar's location enjoys the invisible status of a 'comfort zone', being on a tri-junction between South Asia, Southeast Asia and China, which is economically so significant², thus, no other country is strategically located as Myanmar.³

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1. "The EC-Myanmar/Burma Strategy Paper (2007 – 2013)", Available at http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/where/asia/country-cooperation/myanmar/myanmar_en.htm, p. 6. [accessed on 22 March 2010].
 2. Poon Kim shee, "The Political Economy of China-Myanmar Relations: Strategic and Economic Dimensions", <http://www.ritsumei.ac.jp/acd/cg/ir/college/bulletin/e-vol1/1-3shee.pdf> [accessed on 22 March, 2010]. p. 33
 3. "China Myanmar Dilemma", *Crisis Group Asia Report No 177*, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/asia/north-east-asia/china/177-chinas-myanmar-dilemma.aspx>, [accessed on 22 March 2010]. p. 37

Historical Significance

This land has been known as Myanmar Nation since time immemorial and, in the ancient Chinese history, the people in this land has been referred as ‘Myan’.⁴ The earlier name ‘Burma’ has been in English use, therefore, in 1989, the present self-styled military ruler, probably by all preference to the ancient Chinese name, changed it to be ‘Myanmar’. Officially, it is known as the Union of Myanmar⁵ or ‘Pyi-Htaung Su Myanma Naing Ngan’⁶. This change has remained unacceptable to non-Bhama peoples in Myanmar for their interpretation of ‘Myanma’ as ‘The Union of Bhama Empire’.⁷ Further study on history has revealed that ever since 53 BC till 1784 AD, this land was ruled by twenty to twenty-one dynasties with predominance of three Bhama Empires and it has the same ethnic descendents of Bhama in present Myanmar.⁸ Albeit different ethnic Empires had capital in different locations, but the original borders of the country had remained intact since those times to the present day.⁹ The largest single ethnic group had been the Bhama, around 60%, who dominated the armed forces and the government at present.¹⁰ It appeared that the present self-styled military regime, State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), had been following the same ‘periodic continuities’ like in Dynasties rule by changing the capital to a new location named Naypyidaw¹¹ in Mandalay division,¹² 320 km north of old capital Rangoon and closer strategic location of Pyin-Oo-Lwin for reasons.

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4. *Brief History of the Myanmar Army*, Defence Services Museum and Historical Research Institution, February, 1999. This book was collected by the author when visiting Myanmar in 2001 with Defence Services Command and Staff College at Mirpur as delegation members.
 5. Available at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Burma>, [accessed on 22 March, 2010].
 6. Shwe Lu Maung, *Burma: Nationalism and Ideology*, The University Press Limited, 1989. p. 71
 7. Ibid.
 8. Ibid, Pp. 13-15
 9. *Brief History of the Myanmar Army*, Op.cit, p. 2
 10. The EC-Myanmar/Burma Strategy Paper(2007-2013), p. 41
 11. Xiaolin Guo, “Towards Resolution: China in the Myanmar Issue”, a Silk Road paper Published by the Central Asia Caucasus Institute and Silk Road Studies program, Uppsala University, Sweden, 2007. Between the end of 2005 and spring of 2006, Government ministries were located to Naypyidaw in the town of Pyimana.
 12. Gwillim Law, “Divisions of Myanmar,” Available at <http://www.statoids.com/umm.html>, updated on 20 December, 2009. [accessed on 22 March, 2010].

RELATION OF MYANMAR WITH TWO ASIAN RISING POWERS, CHINA AND INDIA

MYANMAR–CHINA RELATIONS

China's Energy Needs

China's high energy demands would make it the world's largest net importer of crude oil by 2030, placing it slightly ahead of the United States needs.¹³ China is, therefore, set to become quite vulnerable for energy source and supply.¹⁴ China became a net oil importer in 1993, and later Sudan became China's second most important source of oil in Africa.¹⁵ Interestingly, China's import of oil declined in 2008 from Middle East, while increased from Africa.¹⁶ But with two thirds of the world's proven oil reserves, Middle East would still remain as one of the most important source for Chinese oil imports. For increased consumption, imports will increase substantially and China's oil dependency may reach recordable high by 2030¹⁷ despite extensive use of other alternate energy resources. Hence, the transportation-security will be a serious concern to ship¹⁸ the imported oil through a safe alternate route considering the vulnerability of the Straits of Malacca. China has equal concern of secured gas supply for its high demand of natural gas in 2020.¹⁹ These projections indicate that China could import high amount of natural gas in 2020.²⁰ Therefore, besides being a source of energy, Myanmar's location also stands as the only potential supply route over land, bypassing the Malacca Straits to link China with Bay of Bengal.²¹ Therefore, PetroChina eventually signed a gas export Memorandum of Understanding with Myanmar in early 2006 and completed the survey for a 2,389 km pipeline from Kyakphu in Myanmar to China's Yunnan province.²² Finally, for vital energy security, the Chinese government agreed in March 2009 with the Myanmar government to construct oil and gas pipelines linking the two countries²³, which

13. Edward Hunter Christie (Ed.), Joseph Francois, Waltraut Urban, Franz Wirl, "China's Foreign Policy: Genesis, Deployment and selected effects," *FIW Research Report 2009/10 No 03*, January, 2010.

14. Ibid.

15. Ibid, p. 19

16. Ibid, Pp. 30-35

17. Ibid, p. 13

18. Tuli Sinha, "China-Myanmar Energy Engagements Challenges and Opportunities for India," Southeast Asia Research Programme (SEARP) Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, New Delhi developing an alternative framework for peace and security in the region, *IPCS Issue Brief no 134*, December, 2009. p.1.

19. Sinha, Op.cit, p. 2

20. Ibid.

21. Ibid.

22. Ibid.

23. Ibid, p. 38

will pass through strategic location of Pyin-Oo-Lwin. The background of on-going construction of gas and oil pipe lines amply indicated China's interest in Myanmar.

Relationship and Interest

This energy diplomacy has led Myanmar to diversify its foreign relations and expand its diplomatic space to align with rising powers in Asia²⁴. In 2005, a two-day tri-nation meeting of energy ministers from Myanmar, India, and Bangladesh in Yangon failed as the two South Asian countries could not agree on the terms and conditions of the project.²⁵ Later, Myanmar withdrew India's status as preferential buyer on the A1 and A3 blocks of Shwe, and instead declared its intent to sell the gas to PetroChina.²⁶ So at the end of the day, it is everything for who serves the interest of Myanmar, and in that, all road leads to China not to India.²⁷ China has earned a better position to exert its influence over the military junta by investing, when most of the other foreign investors and business organizations left Myanmar under sanction;²⁸ and by protecting Myanmar from international wider sanctions including the UN Security Council resolution.²⁹ This made China a highly valuable partner and Myanmar's leaders were openly grateful for China's continued political support.³⁰ This was one compulsion of Myanmar's strategic objective in fulfilling the energy needs of China with access to Bay of Bengal and port facilities in Rakhine state. Hence, any regime in Myanmar would maintain good relations with China. Politically, economically, strategically, Myanmar is important for China to achieve its strategic presence in the Indian Ocean and to fulfill its long desire of two-ocean objective.³¹ Thus, Myanmar is part of China's grand strategic design to achieve its goal of becoming a great power in the 21st century.³² Therefore, the arguments here highlights the abundance of energy and geo-strategic location as the 'strategic resource', and advantageous use of energy and location for self development underlines the 'strategic concept' in defining the strategic objectives of Myanmar.

24. Ibid.

25. Ibid.

26. Ibid.

27. Ibid.

28. Wilson, Op.cit, p. 87

29. Ibid.

30. Ibid.

31. Shee, Op.cit, p. 43

32. Ibid, p. 50

MYANMAR-INDIA RELATIONS

Emerging Relationship

On the other notes of relationships in trade and economic dimensions, very thoughtfully, India launched a 'look east policy' in 1991 for increased economic and strategic influence in the region. This became even more important when Myanmar entered ASEAN in 1997. Therefore, in pursuance as for engagement under 'Look East Policy' of India, Myanmar joined the BIST-EC in December 1997 for it to be the present BIMST-EC.³³ Looking at India's diplomatic thrust into Southeast Asia, China launched the Kunming Initiative as BCIM in August 1999.³⁴ Later India launched MGC in July 2000 including Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam and Laos and India.³⁵ All these initiatives were welcomed by Myanmar regime as these paved way for engagement after being isolated for decades. This was a clear shift in Indian attitude to gain strategic foothold in Myanmar. But when India appeared at the door of Myanmar, Myanmar had already engaged with China promoting more economic and military activities, based on old relationship of 'open door strategy' by Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping in 1978.³⁶ Virtually, the military junta pulled India into Myanmar so that India could increase her strategic depth with policies of constructive engagement instead of being with the historical past. So Myanmar, with due understanding of the importance of its location, gave strategic access to China, knowing 'China factor' would work greatly for India to set strategic foothold in Myanmar. This has virtually neutralized any effects of international sanctions whatsoever. This interesting strategic scenario let India again revise its foreign policy towards Myanmar.³⁷ So India tried to focus on macro level projects like construction of railways networks, port facilities, hydropower plants and energy development. Since India's plans for a strategic foothold in Myanmar were one sided, it failed to achieve concrete success in this field of macro level investment. The failure was also because Myanmar's oil and gas sector has attracted the largest foreign investment over 21 companies³⁸ of US\$ 14.4 billion.³⁹ Though India could involve 3 energy exploration companies⁴⁰ in areas with highest gas reserve in South East Asia in Myanmar, it had to undergo very harsh negotiations

33. Egreteau Renaud, "India and Burma/Myanmar Relations, from Idealism to Realism", *Center de Sciences Humaines*, New Delhi, India, 11 September, 2003, p. 9

34. Ibid.

35. Ibid.

36. Ibid, p. 944

37. Ibid, p. 946, The source referred, 'in 2002, an Indian official from Ministry of External Affairs claimed that India was sending only "non-lethal" military equipment to Burma".

38. Yhome, Op.cit, p. 8

39. Ibid.

40. Ibid.

to be in the consortium led by the South Korean firm Daewoo for off-shore gas exploration. India's attempts to construct gas pipelines for distribution of gas extracted from A-1 and A-3 back to India failed at the end, as against China's concrete and advantageous offers. Thus, much to the surprise and frustration of India, Myanmar agreed to sell 6.5 tcf of gas from block A-1 to PetroChina over 30 years⁴¹ and decided to offer the right of refining and supplies to China as a favor for a successful effort to block the UN Security Council Resolution on Myanmar in March 2007.⁴² Nevertheless, as the ONGC-Videsh has acquired separate gas assets off the Arakan coast in September 2007⁴³ so there are strong hopes for India to share the energy in Myanmar. Therefore, Bangladesh also could assess the benefit of India getting access to any Arakan energy block and study jointly to share by setting up a pipe-line for much needed energy to support the size of industry in 2021.⁴⁴ However, all now depends on diplomacy for energy to benefit the Northeastern region in India or Southern region of China or Bangladesh or all 3 together against the benefit of Myanmar. One has to wait and see for the outcome of recent five-day visit of Myanmar's head of state to India on 25 July 2010, which might be a beginning of new era.⁴⁵

Network for Development

Against all the odds, Myanmar yet did not frustrate India fully and signed US\$ 110 million "Kaladan Multi-Model Transit Transport Project" with India on 02 April 2008.⁴⁶ With this, Indian northeastern states will have the 'strategic corridor' from Sittwe bypassing Bangladesh.⁴⁷ This also shows clearly that Myanmar wanted both rising powers in Asia to be happy and remain along side in times of critical needs in future. Thus, we may be looking ahead for a trilateral development network between Myanmar, China and India. The analysis again revealed, the energy abundance and geo-strategic location are the 'strategic resource', and an advantageous use of them for economic development, underlines the 'strategic concept' in defining the strategic objectives of Myanmar.

41. Sinha, Op.cit, P. 2

42. Vibhanshu Shekhar, "A Federal Democratic Myanmar-India's Strategic Imperative", An article published in *IPCS ISSUE BRIEF, No 67*, New Delhi, May 2008, p. 3

43. Ibid.

44. The stats are available at <http://www.biiss.org/elahi.pdf>. [accessed on 30 May 2010]

45. Available at <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/%5Cpapers%20%5Cpaper3954.html> [accessed on 16 August 2010]

46. Yhome, Op.cit, p. 17

47. Ibid.

RELATION OF MYANMAR WITH ASEAN STATES

MYANMAR-ASEAN RELATIONS

Historical Perspective

ASEAN⁴⁸ is one institution for effective influence over the regime in Myanmar. Both the rising powers are pursuing economic relations with Myanmar either bilaterally or trilaterally or through institutions like BIMST-EC, MGC and BCIM, which were organized in period between 1997 and 2000, exactly in time frame when Myanmar joined ASEAN in 1997.⁴⁹ At this instance, Myanmar's entry into ASEAN is important to analyze. Myanmar was yet to be in ASEAN when the terms 'constructive engagement' was coined by the Thai foreign minister Arsa Sarsin in 1991.⁵⁰ This initiative was actually a realization of vision in 'changing battlefields to market place' by the Thai Prime Minister Chatichai Choonavan in 1988. By this initiative, Thailand gained rights in Myanmar for trades in 1989. Thus, the growing closeness between Myanmar and Thailand caught the eye of western diplomats. Later in May, 1991, at a meeting in Luxembourg, the European Commission (EC) asked Thailand through ASEAN to assess the situation in Myanmar because SPDC rejected the election won by the National League for Democracy (NLD) in 1990. Following the concept 'constructive engagement', in 1994, the Thai foreign minister Prasong Soonsiri invited the Myanmar Foreign Minister U Ohn Gyaw to attend the meeting in Bangkok as an observer with conditions including release of Aung San Suu Kyi. In 1995, the military junta released Aung San Suu Kyi from six years of house arrest and agreed to join ASEAN. Later in July, 1996, in the fifth ASEAN summit in Bangkok, Myanmar was given the observer status before becoming member in the following year along with Laos. In hindsight, it was the Thailand's initiative and persuasion compelled ASEAN to accept Myanmar as a member. But historically, Thailand and Myanmar never enjoyed friendly relationship for the deep rooted scar of historic wars between Bhama Kingdom and Mon Kingdom when "King Anawratha", the Bhama king, waged war against the Mon King and conquered Thuwanna Bhumi in AD 1050. It happened about 1000 years ago

48. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations, or ASEAN, was established on 8 August, 1967 in Bangkok, Thailand, with the signing of the ASEAN Declaration (Bangkok Declaration) by the Founding Fathers of ASEAN, namely Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand. Available at <http://www.aseansec.org/64.htm>, [accessed on 30 May, 2010]

49. Aung Zaw, "ASEAN-Burma relations, Collection of articles in Challenges to Democratization in Burma by IDEA", p. 42. Available at http://www.idea.int/asia_pacific/burma/upload/exec_summary.pdf, [accessed on 30 May, 2010]

50. Ibid.

but it is still burning in the hearts of Bhamas and Mons.⁵¹⁻⁵² Notwithstanding, a new landscape emerged, when many ASEAN states reevaluated their interest in Myanmar, with the concept of ‘Constructive Engagement’.⁵³ Concurrently, when China expressed its assertiveness to claim areas contiguous in South China Sea, the ARF (ASEAN Regional forum) was formed as a collective security arrangement with China, EU, Japan, Russia and USA to build confidence and increase engagements.⁵⁴ But a serious economic concern appeared as other markets emerged to challenge ASEAN. Therefore, ASEAN liberalized trade and investment regulation with promulgation of Singapore Declaration in 1992, and to make the market even bigger, ASEAN continued its expansion policy to include all of Southeast Asia. Myanmar stood as a magnet for investment in more 45 million consumers and abundance of natural resources, and became a part of ASEAN on the 30th anniversary of ASEAN’s creation. Inclusion of Myanmar, along with Laos and Cambodia, the ASEAN-10 offered a population of about 500 million, an area of 4.5 million sq km, total GNP of US\$ 685 billion, a total trade of US\$ 720 billion with supply of cheap natural resources.⁵⁵ Though many scholars referred inclusion of Myanmar in ASEAN as a troubled marriage⁵⁶ but fundamentally, it was to prevent communism spreading in the region. Therefore, despite intransigent behavior with siege mentality, Myanmar succeeded to remain engaged with ASEAN without any domestic political concession.

Present State of Relations

The declaration of 16th ASEAN summit in Ha Noi 08 and 09 April 2010, ‘Towards ASEAN Community: From Vision to Action’, stated the importance of national reconciliation in Myanmar and the holding of the general election in a free, fair, and inclusive manner for contributing to Myanmar’s stability and development.⁵⁷ Further review of the declaration⁵⁸ showed how Myanmar would immensely benefit in this century being in ASEAN. The declaration defined strategies for quick Economic Recovery and Development, Connectivity in transportation and Information Communication Technology (ICT), energy and cross border facilitation for smooth movement of people, goods, and services, to

51. Maung, Op.cit, p. 10

52. Ibid.

53. Ibid.

54. Ibid.

55. Ibid.

56. Ibid.

57. The European Council welcomed this “declaration of ASEAN in 16th Summit on 09 April 2010.” 3009th *FOREIGN AFFAIRS Council meeting*, Luxembourg, 26 April, 2010, Council conclusions on Burma/ Myanmar.

58. International and Regional Issues, highlights of Chairman’s Statement in 16th ASEAN Summit. Available at <http://www.aseansec.org/24509.htm>, [accessed on 30 May, 2010].

intensity efforts in response to Climate Change, with priority for Education and Human Resources Development, stressed the importance for 'Centrality' by 2015. The declaration also defined strategies for ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC), Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC), the Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone Treaty (SEANWFZ), the Declaration of Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DOC), the ARF, the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM), ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Transnational Crime (AMMTC) and the ASEAN Convention on Counter-Terrorism to ensure regional peace and security. The declaration also highlighted that the Intra-ASEAN trade almost tripled to US\$ 458.1 billion in 2008 as compared to 2000 when all ten Member States joined the CEPT-AFTA. The declaration expressed satisfactions with the achievements in ASEAN-China and the ASEAN-India Trade in Goods Agreement, the two big emerging economies of Asia. The declaration highlighted the extensive discussion regarding International and Regional Issues, stressing the need for Myanmar to continue to work with ASEAN and United Nations in this process. To summarize, Myanmar by its good conduct would surely benefit as like other member states in ASEAN. So one would find that since the Union of Myanmar joined ASEAN in July 1997, the country completed thirteen years as a member state to become a part of the strategy of "Towards the ASEAN Community: from Vision to Action". This achievement defined success in both ends of relationship between Myanmar and ASEAN with good sense of tolerance. Thus, this is a 'periodic behavior' that may be considered as 'continuities' since history and using this behavior opportunistically for righteous outlook exposure, which underlines the 'strategic concept' in defining the 'strategic objectives' of Myanmar. Therefore, for the other determinants in defining Myanmar's strategic objectives, it is now essential to study relations with countries located beyond immediate neighbors and regions.

RELATION OF MYANMAR WITH THE US AND EUROPE

MYANMAR-UNITED STATES RELATIONS

Myanmar's Apprehensions

Myanmar's apprehension about US, since the beginning of this century, was that US might get into internal affairs with rights to exercise the joint declaration by the ASEAN-United States for Cooperation to Combat International Terrorism 01 August 2002.⁵⁹ Following the Rose revolution in Georgia in November, 2003⁶⁰

59. Available at <http://www.aseansec.org/22684.htm>, [accessed on 29, May 2010]

60. Available at <http://www.globalsecurity.org/intell/ops/rose.htm>, [accessed on 31, May 2010]

and the Orange revolution in Ukraine in November, 2004⁶¹, the Saffron revolution in August, 2007⁶² was thought to be planned to uproot the military regime in Myanmar. Myanmar's apprehension further grew to a height seeing rapidity of ASEAN-US dialogue relations in December 2009.⁶³ All these apprehensions are outcome of one being fearful, suffering from siege mentality, being intransigent and impervious in attitude. Albeit hypothetical, at any instances, militarization of the area surrounding Myanmar, including the maritime boundary to control sea trade routes in Bay of Bengal and South China Sea, is quite a possibility by US under the agreements and dialogue relations with ASEAN. Thus shifting the capital from Yangon division to Mandalay division in geographical depth could be a visible manifestation of those apprehensions in the present Myanmar regime.

Sanction versus Engagement

There were no visible evidences of US sanctions imposed in the 'Burmese freedom and Democracy Act of 2003' neither let military regime produce any political concession for democracy.⁶⁴ The On-going US policies rather seemed to help the Myanmar regime to cooperate substantially with the international community on issues such as narcotics trafficking, religious freedom, money laundering and people trafficking.⁶⁵ Additionally, when a different situation developed following the change in Prime Minister in the military leadership of SPDC in October 2004, US placed Myanmar on the UN Security Council in September 2006.⁶⁶ And when in January 2007, the US proposal⁶⁷ was put to vote as agenda under Chapter-VII of the UN Charter in United Nations Security Council (UNSC) that failed to achieve no-veto⁶⁸ from China.⁶⁹ Understandably, Washington has been partially successful in seeking international support for

61. Available at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Orange_revolution, [accessed on 31 May 2010].

62. Available at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saffron_revolution, [accessed on 31 May 2010].

63. Overview of ASEAN-US Dialogue Relations as on 14 December 2009. Available at <http://www.aseansec.org/23222.htm>, [accessed on 30 May 2010].

64. Wilson, Op.cit, Pp. 90-91

65. Ibid, p. 91

66. Ibid.

67. Available at http://www.unscburma.org/Updates/2007/UNSC_Update_12_January_2007.html, [accessed on 30 May 2010].

68. On 12 January 2007, China and Russia used their veto power in the UN Security Council to stop a resolution calling for Burma's military junta to release all political prisoners including Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, cease attacks on ethnic groups, and speed transition to democracy. The vote was 9 to 3 with South Africa joining China and Russia in opposition, and three other countries, Congo Republic, Indonesia and Qatar, abstaining. Belgium, France, Ghana, Italy, Panama, Peru, Slovakia, the UK and the US voted in favor. China and Russia argued that they shared concerns about conditions in Burma but considered them internal matters that did not constitute threats to international peace and security and therefore the issue should not be dealt with by the Security Council.

69. Xiaolin Guo, Op.cit, p. 77

its campaign.⁷⁰ But in recent time, there is a development that needs focus and thoughtful study, where apparently US expressed its concern over Myanmar's likely desire to achieve capability for strategic deterrence. During the period, which covers almost the first decade of this century, one would find very low level of media activities on the issue of 'Nuclear Burma' till 2005, while the same figure jumped to an alarming level of 67 in 2009 and within the first four month of 2010, it is already to a level of 21. That does anyway highlights relations between the United States and the Union of Myanmar because 34 reports out of 105 in total are from the US in general including 13 as 'Daily Press Briefing' from the Department of States and the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in different times of year 2009 on the issue of nuclear in Myanmar. This development has led the present regime in the US for engagement in dialogues with Myanmar silently. This is a fundamental shift in US-Myanmar relations as understood from the statement of the Secretary of State Clinton in Jakarta in early 2009 that Washington was looking at new strategies to 'more effectively help the Burmese people.'⁷¹

MYANMAR-EUROPE RELATIONS

Through the EU and ASEAN

Study of ASEAN-EU dialogues relations on 12 December 2009 showed a prime goal to see a legitimate, democratically elected civilian government in Myanmar. The same also expressed its critical views about the absence of tangible progress with regard to the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.⁷² Contacts with the government in the framework of ASEAN-US meetings are regularly used to raise the Union's concerns.⁷³ Bilateral relations between Myanmar and EU are dealt by framework of 'EU Common Position'.⁷⁴ ⁷⁵ Presently, the EU provides assistance on need basis, based on the strategy paper on Myanmar for the period between 2007 and 2013, concentrating on two focal sectors including education and health with estimated budget of €65

70. Ibid.

71. Kurt M Chambell, Purposes and Principles of US Engagement in Burma, Statement of the Assistant Secretary, Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs on 10 May, 2010 after 2nd trip in Naypyidaw. Available at: <http://www.state.gov/p/eap/rls/rm/2010/05/141669.htm>, [accessed on 30 May, 2010]

72. Available at http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/myanmar/index_en.htm, [accessed on 28 May 2010].

73. Available at http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/myanmar/index_en.htm, [accessed on 29 May 2010].

74. EU 'Common Position' – Provisions of the Treaties and EP Rules of Procedures concerning common positions, which is referred by the European Council to the European Parliament. The Common Position in the context of the common foreign and security policy (CFSP) is designed to make cooperation more systematic and improve its coordination. The member states are required to comply with and uphold such positions which have been adopted unanimously at the council.

75. The "EC-Burma/Myanmar Strategy Paper(2007-2013)," available at [http://www.deltha.ec.europa.eu/Myanmar/MM2008/Burma Myanmar SP2007-2013EN.pdf](http://www.deltha.ec.europa.eu/Myanmar/MM2008/Burma%20Myanmar%20SP2007-2013EN.pdf), [accessed on 30 May, 2010]

million.⁷⁶ However, in response to bloody crack down on ‘saffron revolution’ in August 2007, the EU applied more stringent sanctions targeted against 1207 firms controlled by the regime.⁷⁷ However, on 27 April 2010, as the foreign ministers agreed, EU again renewed its existing economic sanctions for a year against the regime.⁷⁸ Otherwise, the European Commission (EC) interventions have been limited to scope and channeled through the UN system or through international NGO and amount of assistance being limited; it was difficult to prove their long term sustainability on the overall development in Myanmar. Different independent donor countries and the EU members include the UK, Germany, France, Sweden, Denmark. From Asia, China provides substantial support to Myanmar, Japan had been Myanmar’s largest aid donor until 2003 and Thailand’s development assistance to Myanmar is mostly as grants for infrastructure projects, e.g. for the construction of roads and bridges. The UN has an active presence in Myanmar with a range of UN agencies and UNDP.⁷⁹ Like ASEAN-EU, contacts with the government in the framework of ASEM⁸⁰ also attempted to engage Myanmar.⁸¹ In that, Europe virtually failed to keep Myanmar away from ASEM for divisions among European countries but nor did it influence the leadership in Myanmar.⁸² Therefore, one might conclude by saying, having achieved the primary objectives, though limited, regime has earned recognition through participation in ASEM regularly.

Sanctions versus Engagement

Taking both approaches of relationship between Europe and Myanmar, it appeared that the EU policies did not attract attention of the Myanmar leadership as it had no visible impact and showed no cracking.⁸³ When the United States and the EU gradually introduced stricter sanctions, China, India, Thailand, North Korea and Pakistan have become Myanmar’s most important trading partners. Therefore, forcing western business to withdraw from the country only produced

76. Ibid.

77. Ingrid Melander, “EU implements sanctions on Myanmar junta”, *Reuters News*, 19 November 2007, Brussels

78. EU renews sanctions against Burmese regime on 27 April 2010, *Mizzima*, 16 May, 2010, Available at <http://www.mizzima.com/news/world/3867-eu-renews-sanctions-against-burmese-regime-.html>, [accessed on 30 May, 2010]

79. The EC-Myanmar/Burma Strategy Paper (2007-2013), Op.cit, p. 13

80. The Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) is an informal process of dialogue and co-operation bringing together the 27 European Union Member States and the European Commission with 16 Asian countries and the ASEAN Secretariat. The ASEM dialogue addresses political, economic and cultural issues, with the objective of strengthening the relationship between our two regions, in a spirit of mutual respect and equal partnership. Available at <http://www.aseminfoboard.org/page.phtml?code=About>. [accessed on 30 May 2010]

81. Available at http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/myanmar/index_en.htm, [accessed on 29 May, 2010]

82. Ibid.

83. Ibid.

a vacuum, quickly filled by Chinese companies regularly.⁸⁴ The political and economic influence of China into Myanmar was directly proportional to the level of sanction by the EU and the US. It stands very clear now that higher the sanctions, bigger the space for China in Myanmar. Therefore, cueing from the realization in Obama administration for engagement, Europe may review its strategy for engagement with Myanmar soon.⁸⁵ The sanction-target Myanmar was found using these forums as a network for engagement with the European Union and the United states using member's rights through ASEAN. Additionally, taking due advantage of being in isolation under these sanctions, the regime probably was leaning to learn the survival strategy from North Korea. Thus, being a nation with strategic resources including autarky, nationalistic and self imposed isolation policies and by applying them to reduce the effects of sanctions, has frustrated the big powers, which also defines the essential background of strategic objectives.

RELATION OF MYANMAR WITH NORTH KOREA

COMMONALITIES

Historical Background

The severe relation of 1983⁸⁶ was reestablished again between Myanmar and North Korea in April, 2007⁸⁷ with very rapid improvement in bilateral military cooperation based on certain perceived commonalities. To understand the backdrop of those 'commonalities', study revealed after the end of Korean War in 1953, North Korea enjoyed impressive economic growth⁸⁸, which later continued to decline till 1980s. In same decade, the severe energy shortage in North Korea caused further decline of its economy that led the country to sign an agreement with Soviet Union to import nuclear reactors and oil.⁸⁹ With the collapse of Soviet Union in 1985, the security environment in Korean Peninsula also changed. Thus, Pyongyang started construction of two nuclear reactors, and probably succeeded in acquiring primitive nuclear weapon capability by early 1990s.⁹⁰ This isolated country was subjected to stringent sanctions by US and

84. Ibid.

85. Ibid. p. 3

86. Bertil Lintner, "Myanmar and North Korea Share a tunnel vision", a media news on 19 July, 2006, available at http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Southeast_Asia/HG19Ae01.html, [accessed on 01 April 2010]

87. Norman Robespierre, "Nuclear bond for North Korea and Myanmar", an article in media on 04 October 2008. Available at http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Southeast_Asia/JJ04Ae01.html, [accessed on 01 April 2010]

88. Lu Yin, "Challenges of Non-Proliferation in Northeast Asia and Possible Solutions", *Asia Paper* Published by the institution for security and development policy, Sweden, February 2010, p.10.

89. Ibid, p. 11

90. Ibid.

Japan.⁹¹ Therefore, for the survival, North Korea opted to continue with nuclear proliferation to enhance its international status along side of non-nuclear South Korea⁹² but continued to suffer from paranoid-type threat perception.⁹³

Minimal Deterrence

Therefore, looking at how US influenced the Gulf war and the Iraq war, North Korea became more resolved to achieve minimal nuclear deterrence power⁹⁴. Once the former Indian Army Chief of Staff, General K Sundarji pertinently commented on the importance of the nuclear deterrence for weak countries, ‘[Coalition member]’ could go in because the United States had nuclear weapons and Iraq didn’t. The Gulf War emphasized once again that nuclear weapons are the ultimate coin of power.’⁹⁵ From the pattern of actions by North Korea, any quasi scholar would assume that possession of nuclear weapons would still be regarded as indispensable part of the security strategies in any desperate situation.⁹⁶ Additionally, North Korea has also become a covert nuclear reactor supplier to Syria and Iran as revealed.⁹⁷ It was estimated in 2009 that North Korea earned about \$1.5 billion annually by selling weapons to other countries. North Korea has three customers so far including Iran, Syria, and possibly Myanmar.⁹⁸ North Korea reportedly has about 3,000 scientists and research personnel devoted to the Yongbyon program, and many of them have studied nuclear technology in the Soviet Union and China.⁹⁹ Desperate for more financial benefits, North Korea continued its activities to provide even training and weapons to certain countries.¹⁰⁰ To that extent, North Korea also sold long range missile in exchange to develop Highly Enriched Uranium (HEU) infrastructure.¹⁰¹ Such activities clearly exposed that North Korea has achieved Minimal Nuclear Deterrence that definitely has also given enough boosts to bargain in negotiating with world powers in general and US in specific as was seen in recent Six Party Nuclear Negotiation. This model to achieve Minimal Nuclear Deterrence could be the strategic concept of a country having same ‘commonalities’.

91. Ibid, p. 14

92. Ibid.

93. Ibid, p. 12

94. Available at <http://isis-online.org/isis-reports/detail/burma-a-nuclear-wanabee-suspicious-links-to-north-korea-high-tech-procurement/>, [accessed on 30 May, 2010]

95. Yin, Op.cit, p. 13

96. Ibid, p. 6

97. Lewis M Stern et al, “Burma in Strategic Perspective: Renewing Discussion of Options”, a publication in *Strategic Forum* of Institute for National Strategic Studies in National Defense University, No 249, October 2009, p. 4

98. Larry A. Niksch, “North Korea’s Nuclear Weapons development and Diplomacy”, A publication in *Congressional Research Service*, 05 January, 2010, p. 5

99. Ibid, p. 20

100. Ibid.

101. Ibid, p. 21

MYANMAR'S DREAM TO ACHIEVE STRATEGIC DETERRENCE

Emerging Survival Bi or Trilateral

Therefore, Myanmar's sudden tilt towards North Korea may be viewed as part of a decision to acquire likely nuclear deterrence capability in the face of mounting threats against the military junta¹⁰² and may also be viewed as an attempt to accrue international respect and prestige, or a strategy for securing a bargaining power in future¹⁰³ as enjoyed by North Korea.¹⁰⁴ Thus a question posed, should North Korea be allowed as the world's supplier of nuclear weapons technology?¹⁰⁵ Since early 2000s, many dissidents and defectors from Myanmar have talked of a 'nuclear battalion' and an atomic 'Ayelar Project'.¹⁰⁶ The revelations of the North Korean reactor in Syria, along with developments in Iran and Burma, appear to point toward a different type of proliferation ring-- one run by national governments, perhaps also assisted by other clandestine networks".¹⁰⁷ Therefore, likely involvement cannot be ruled out with rumors that Myanmar's military junta received assistance in constructing nuclear facilities from North Korea and other country that pose a serious concern to the Indian strategists as nuclear Myanmar might introduce a new strategic paradigm to the region.¹⁰⁸⁻¹⁰⁹⁻¹¹⁰ In early August 2009, international media reported world wide the story of two Myanmar defectors, unknown to each other, one a Russian-trained officer in a Myanmar 'secret nuclear battalion,' and the other a former executive, who believed to have handled nuclear contracts with Russia and North Korea, who shed light on a secret complex, allegedly located in tunnels at Naung Laing, a mountain in northern Myanmar adjacent to a Russian-built civilian reactor, which was the center of Myanmar's attempt to acquire a nuclear weapons capability. This location is in close proximity of Pyin-Oo-Lwin, and it is the same location through which the gas-pipe line between Sittwe and Yunnan will pass by. This is also in close proximity of new capital Naypyidaw. The

102. Lewis, Op.cit, p. 7

103. Ibid.

104. "China's Myanmar Dilemma", *Crisis Group Asia Report No 177*, 14 September 2009, . 29-30.

105. Gregory L. Schulte, "Uncovering Syria's Covert Reactor", *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Polity Outlook*, January 2010, p. 5

106. David Albright, Paul Brannan et al, "Burma: A Nuclear Wannabe; Susicious Links to North Korea; High-Tech Procurements and Enigmatic Facilities," *ISIS Report* published on 28 January, 2010, Available at <http://isis-online.org/isis-reports/detail/burma-a-nuclear-wanabee-suspicious-links-to-north-korea-high-tech-procureme/>, [accessed on 30 May 2010]

107. Available at <http://www.journalgazette.net/article/20090930/BLOGS01/909309959>, [accessed on 02 April, 2010]

108. Available at http://www.the-diplomat.com/001f1281_r.aspx?artid=371, [accessed on 29 May, 2010]

109. Available at http://www.the-diplomat.com/001f1281_r.aspx?artid=371, [accessed on 30 May, 2010]

110. Available at <http://isis-online.org/isis-reports/detail/burma-a-nuclear-wanabee-suspicious-links-to-north-korea-high-tech-procureme/>, [accessed on 30 May, 2010]

defectors claimed that, with North Korean assistance, Yangon was building a hidden nuclear reactor and plutonium extraction facilities.¹¹¹

Growing Concern of the US

On the same issue, a month earlier U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton said in July, 2009, “We know there are also growing concerns about military cooperation between North Korea and Burma which we take very seriously,”¹¹² On the higher note of concern, the US President himself expressed in NPR-2010, “...Today’s other pressing threat is nuclear proliferation. Additional countries – especially those at odds with the United States, its allies and partners, and the broader international community – may acquire nuclear weapons. In pursuit of their nuclear ambitions, North Korea and Iran have violated nonproliferation obligations...Their illicit supply of arms and sensitive material and technologies has heightened global proliferation risks and regional tensions.”¹¹³ A list of nuclear exports by North Korea and the updated list as on February, 2010 include Myanmar.¹¹⁴ As a highlight of increased bilateral relationship between these two countries, there has been increasing number of North Korean ships that reportedly visited Yangon, increasing speculation about the relationship, including nuclear collaboration in recent years.¹¹⁵ Albeit, there has never been the serious prospect of any invasion, but it would be a mistake to underestimate the impact of such threat perceptions that influenced the regime’s security policies. Again, it is also unlikely that Myanmar would be abandoned by the powerful energy hungry neighbours and region despite any concerns they may have about the regime’s nuclear ambitions.¹¹⁶ Thus, of all Southeast Asian countries, Myanmar arguably has the strongest strategic rationale to develop nuclear weapons using foreign exchange reserves of USD 3500 mil¹¹⁷⁻¹¹⁸. Additionally, with added advantage of being in isolation, one neither can underestimate the capability nor can overestimate untested intelligence sources, while no one would repeat the mistakes which preceded the 2003 Iraq War. Therefore, under this dilemma,

111. Lewis, Op.cit, p. 7

112. Andrew Selth, “Burma and North Korea: Smoke or Fire?”, *Policy Analysis Paper* in ASPI(Australia Strategic Policy Institute), Dated: 24 August 2009, p. 2

113. *Nuclear Posture Review Report (NPR-2010)*, the report provides a roadmap for implementing President Obama’s agenda for reducing nuclear risks, published on 06 April, 2010 by Department of Defence, USA, Pp.3-4. Available at <http://merln.ndu.edu/index.cfm?secID=151&pageID=3&type=section>, [accessed on 29 May 2010]

114. Available at <http://merln.ndu.edu/index.cfm?secID=108&pageID=3&type=section#nuclear> & at http://www.nti.org/e_research/profiles/NK/Nuclear/47_1273.html, [accessed on 29 May 2010]

115. “China’s Myanmar Dilemma,” *Crisis Group Asia Report No 177*, 14 September 2009, Pp. 29-30.

116. Ibid, p.8.

117. Available at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_foreign_exchange_reserves, dated: 29 May 2010, [accessed on 29 May 2010]

118. Ibid, p.6.

without investigating it thoroughly first, no government would accept the claims that Myanmar has a secret nuclear weapons program.¹¹⁹ This is the strategic effect that Myanmar has resonated in the region and globe through media in different times of year 2009. The North Korea model of acquiring nuclear reactors and weapons could be in the strategic concept for Myanmar. This might lead to the emergence of another bi or trilateral network between Myanmar, North Korea and a third country for survival, modeled on compulsion to achieve 'minimal deterrence with minimal transparency for maximum security guarantees.'¹²⁰

MYANMAR'S STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES AND IMPLICATIONS FOR BANGLADESH

MYANMAR'S STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

Therefore, the Union of Myanmar should have three strategic objectives (ends). Firstly, Myanmar would keep the friendly ties with its two neighbors, China and India, which would lead to a trilateral network. Thus, this may be referred as, '**Development Trilateral Network**' with the northern neighbors. Secondly, essentially there is a need for Myanmar to be in ASEAN for the very stability in South-east Asia. Consequently, the US and Europe used this regional forum to engage Myanmar for its likely usefulness in near future. Thus, this may be referred as state-region-state '**Engagement Trilateral Network**'. Thirdly, as Myanmar has endorsed the 'commonalities' with another pariah state, North Korea, thus, the military junta is likely to stress on the importance of nuclear deterrence being a weaker state with likely hidden link or support of a third country. This may be referred as, '**Survival Bi or Trilateral Network**'.

These three networks would surely offer a sense of direction to Myanmar in defining the 'strategic objectives' (ends) in the 21st century, which might be attained through pragmatic adjustments to the changes in 'strategic environment' of the 21st century.

The networks for **Development** and **Survival** would have direct implications on Bangladesh with indirect of the other.

IMPLICATIONS FOR BANGLADESH

Bangladesh has vision to be the middle income-group country (MIC) by 2021. Accordingly, the size of the industry by 2021 in reference to energy-need would

119. Andrew, Op.cit, p. 2

120. Available at <http://isis-online.org/isis-reports/detail/burma-a-nuclear-wanabee-suspicious-links-to-north-korea-high-tech-procurement/> [accessed on 29 May, 2010]

increase. Majority of the industry is gas-dependent in Bangladesh, when the likely proven reserve of gas is learnt to be less. There will definitely be shortage of needed gas for the size of the industry that would contribute to the national income in 2021. Despite high proven reserve of coal in storage, Bangladesh imports coal every year in absence of much needed coal energy. Present roadways would certainly increase its capacity to sustain the economic growth. Therefore, in this era of globalized economy, Bangladesh has to re-think and re-assess the strategic environment in both internal and external dimensions. Bangladesh may not be able to compete in the race for energy with India and China towards Myanmar but keeping the national interest at forefront, it should look for rightful share in the energy network between Myanmar, China and India. Myanmar's desire to use nuclear for peaceful purpose with abundance of energy available for export to China and India should logically appear unrealistic; therefore, likely use as deterrence would be the main objective. Hence, undisputedly it would implicate the national security of Bangladesh and there will be a security dilemma in the region. Country like Bangladesh then would fail to bargain with Myanmar from its comparative low position of strength, thus, may pose a gesture of naivety for the rights in maritime boundary. Additionally, the region cannot expect any more from the regime if there is any sort of nuclear accident.¹²¹ On the other note, one may argue that Bangladesh rather could stand more logically for use of nuclear as the source of energy for development and the need may even arise early if Bangladesh fails to share energy network between Myanmar, India and China. However, by the end of next decade, external strategic environment could be more volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous with likely capability of nuclear deterrence in Myanmar as a last resort. However, all depends in balancing the emergence of the '**Engagement Network**' and '**Survival Network**' by all stakeholders. The higher the engagement, lower the threat to the survival of Myanmar.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

RECOMMENDATIONS

Three recommendations could be inferred logically as a respond to the implications for Myanmar's strategic objectives in the 21st century:

- a. Bangladesh should develop political strength and be able to apply that strength with "**right orientation**" of the strategic environment in the next decade of this 21st century.

121. Available at <http://www.bangkokpost.com/news/investigation/21362/> [accessed on 29 May, 2010]

- b. Bangladesh should engage in more **“dialogue-relations”** with Myanmar and India for understanding of mutual dependencies and benefits in trans-national energy resources.
- c. Bangladesh should connect itself with allied countries willing to set up **“nuclear reactor for peaceful”** use as energy-source and pragmatically balance the likely ‘Minimal Deterrence’ capability of Myanmar.

CONCLUSION

Being in the center of networks, with opportunities to develop, engage and survive, Myanmar would probably not fail to assess the prevailing strategic environment, if the calculations of strategic resources and strategic concepts for appropriate strategic objectives are done with required synergy and symmetry. For intangible strategic resources within the internal strategic environment, study of the historical background as far as 53 BC, revealed that imperviousness and intransigence with attitude of xenophobe and siege mentality were virtually their strength to survive in long isolation within the ethnic dynasties or kingdoms. All these Empires did rise and sustain with economic prosperity for longer period when represented the ‘continuities’ of periodic behavior but fell when ruled with aperiodic behavior. Its tangible strategic resources are fundamentally the minerals, abundance of needed energy and the advantages of geo-strategic location. Independent study of bilateral relationship with China and India revealed that energy-rich Myanmar was conceptually inclined towards China allowing energy link between Sittwe with Yunnan. The regime was equally inclined towards India, but to a lesser degree, though allowed to develop energy link between Sittwe and Mizoram. This trilateral network would ensure economic development in Myanmar. On the second note, by keeping engaged with southern neighboring countries, Myanmar used ASEAN as a gateway to engage with European Union and the United States. Though all sanctions by EU and US so far have proved nothing but more space for China and India in Myanmar but yet study has indicated emergence of another trilateral network for engagement. When these both trilateral networks appeared to be the most probable strategic objectives of Myanmar in the 21st century by all fairness, the emergence of third bi or trilateral network appeared to be the most dangerous strategic objectives. The study of relationship with North Korea has revealed recent reestablishment of diplomatic relation between these two countries was based on hypothesis of ‘commonalities’. The fear of nuclear link between these two pariah states became more authentic when US Government expressed their serious concern of military cooperation. This could be a bi or trilateral network with likely support of a third country. This might let the emergence of 3rd bi or trilateral network for survival, which might seriously implicate the national

security of neighbors including Bangladesh. Nevertheless, future cannot be predicted in strategic studies while can only be anticipated with conditions through strategic effects.

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