

Critical appraisal of American 3-D policy toward Bangladesh

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America is the world's strongest military power with defence budget nearly \$500 billion per year, the largest economy and possesses the capacity to demonstrate its power into space, over the land and the sea. Some say no power has attained such might since that of the Roman Empire.

Being a super power, America has global constituency and interest. Greek historian Thucydides (460-395 BC) summed up aptly the behaviour of powerful states toward weaker states when he wrote:

*“ The strong do what they have power to do and
The weak accept what they have to accept.”*

Bangladesh with 150 million people with 88% per cent Muslim majority country in South Asia comes very much within the radar screen of America. What Bangladesh does or does not do is being watched by America with “eagle eyes” because misgoverned or weak states are perceived to be the source of many of the world's serious problems from terrorism to poverty to civil war among others.

Professor Francis Fukuyama, of Johns Hopkins University in his book ‘State Building’ (2005) writes : “Lack of state capacity in poor countries has come haunt the developed world much more directly. The end of the Cold War left a band of failed and weak states stretching from the Balkans through Caucasus, the Middle East, Central Asia, and South Asia... Radical Islamist terrorism combined with the availability of weapons of mass destruction added a major security dimension to the burden of problems created by weak governance.”

Current US policy-3D:

Against that background, it was interesting to note the address of US Ambassador to Bangladesh James F. Moriarty at a national conference on ‘Democracy, Development and Security: Bangladesh Perspective’ organized by Bangladesh Political Science Association.

He said that American policy towards Bangladesh currently stood on 3-D, namely “Democracy, Development and Denial for Space Terrorism”.

It is noted about a few months before American policy toward Bangladesh was 3-R, namely “Reform, Register (voters) and Resign”. Obviously the word “Resign” was meant for the Care-Taker government.

During the Clinton administration, Karl Inderfurth, a senior official of the State Department in 2000, said that America's interest in South Asia was to "democracy, economic reforms, and integration into the global mainstream".

It seems that America changes its policy keeping its interests in mind and adapting to its needs. There is nothing wrong in that.

Let me briefly analyse the current policy of 3-D of the Bush administration.

Democracy:

Who does not want democracy? Some say it is a matter of historical necessity. Bangladeshi people fought for democracy and paid supreme sacrifice of lives in 1971. One of the strengths of Bangladesh people is the utter dislike of authoritarianism and history says that they fought against foreign invaders in the past.

One predominant view is democracy thrives in countries that meet certain level of standard in economic, social and cultural environment. On the other hand, another view is democracy leads to economic progress and development. In a broader sense, democracy can mean a respect for common humanity and human dignity.

Whatever the view is about the pre-conditions of democracy, participatory democracy brings political stability in the country. Since democratic government is accountable to people, it addresses the issues of poverty, unemployment, primary health care and education. Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen believes that famine does not occur in a democratic country.

The main ingredients of democracy are free and fair election, rule of law, freedom of media and freedom of expression and assembly, viable opposition parties, equal opportunity for all and independent judiciary. Therefore American policy in establishing democracy in Bangladesh serves the interest of both American and Bangladeshi people.

This American policy of spreading democracy, however, does not seem to be pressed with regard to its closest allies in the Middle East and Central Asia. Some of the leaders who head either dictatorial or authoritarian regimes are warmly welcomed at the Texas ranch of President Bush. What message do they convey to the world by such actions? It means "pick and choose policy" of convenience, not of conviction.

Development:

Development meant means not only economic growth but equitable distribution of national income with a view to reducing poverty in the country. We can measure development by asking three basic questions: what has been happening to poverty? What has been happening to unemployment? What has been happening to inequality?

What is the role of America in development in poor countries? American people are told by their government that America is the world's most generous nation. According to an author Ziauddin Sardar, (Why do people hate America? 2002) this is one of the most conventional pieces of 'knowledgeable ignorance.'

USA's official development aid (ODA), in terms of percentage of their GNP, has almost always been lower than any other industrialized nation in the world. Only since 2004 have they move up from last place, by just one or two places. The increase is due to geo-strategic concerns of the US, such as fighting terrorism.

OECD statistics show that the net official development aid of the US constitutes only 0.16 % percent of GNI in 2007 that lags far behind the 0.7 percent target the United Nations set 35 years ago. It is noted that Norway, Sweden, Denmark and the Netherlands provide ODA exceeding 0.7 per cent of their GNI.

Former World Bank Chairman James Wolfensohn, departed in 2005 with a stark warning that " a thousand billion dollars around the world on military spending and around \$60 billion on development is a huge imbalance. And we think we are dealing with the issue of peace."

Denial for Space of Terrorism:

With regard to denial for space of terrorism, Bangladesh shares its deep concerns with America. Bangladesh condemns the targeted killing of civilians and terrorist violence, in all its forms and manifestations anywhere in the world.

Bangladesh sternly took action against Islamic militants within the country and the caretaker government has adopted a zero tolerance towards terrorists. Laws have been enacted to prevent money transfers from abroad and terrorism has been widely defined.

In this connection, one must consider the causes of terrorism? Although there is no uniform view on the causes, there is no dispute that economic and social deprivations often lead people to Islamic militancy.

Since that time of creation of Israel in 1948, the peaceful lives of millions of Palestinians have been ruined, their society fragmented, possessions pillaged and hope for freedom and nationhood remains unfilled as of today. Millions of Palestinians nourish their aspiration for freedom, dignified living within a free nation-state.

The US has thoroughly destabilised the Middle East by invading Iraq. Many believe the war on terror is like fighting a fire with petrol. War is fuel for terrorism, not a deterrent.

Many including eminent journalist Robert Fisk who has expertise and experience in reporting from the Middle East recently writes: "Yes, we huff and we puff about democracy and freedom and human rights, though we give little enough of them to the Muslim world....As long as there is injustice in the Middle East, terrorism will continue."

There is a widely-held view that if the Bush administration initiates a policy of inclusion and impartiality on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, it may see the light in resolving one of the most intractable disputes in the world that is perceived to be one of the causes of Islamic militancy.

Another question is why do certain individuals become suicide bombers? Experts say when suicide attackers think living and dying has no difference for their situation as they have been pushed to the wall, they act as suicide bombers.

Professor Robert Pape of the University of Chicago writes in his book *“Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism,”* (2005) that contrary to popular belief, today’s suicide bombers are not mainly depressed, lonely individuals on the margins of society, nor are they religious fanatics.

In fact, Pape says, most are socially integrated, productive members of their community. That is why ordinarily neighbours are surprised that persons who looked normal and sensible in the community have turned out to be suicide attackers.

All the London attackers of July 7 of 2005 were normal people, belonged to middle class, some were students and one was a teacher. They do not necessarily hate Western values or Western society, but they are angered by the strategic and foreign policies of the US, particularly in the Middle East including the on-going Iraqi war.

It is interesting to note that Dr. Aaron David Miller, who worked under both Republican and Democratic administrations, in his book *“The Much Too Promised Land”*, (March 2008) writes that the Bush team in eight years has managed to put America in the unique position in the Middle East where “it is not liked, not feared, and not respected’.

Another fact is which nations manufacture and sell arms to developing countries? How do terrorists get lethal weapons?

The global arms market is highly competitive, with manufacturing nations seeking both to increase profits and to expand political influence through weapons sales to developing nations, which reached nearly \$28.8 billion in 2006.

Statistics show that the United States has maintained its role as the leading supplier of weapons to the developing world in 2006, followed by Russia and Britain. If these countries do not sell weapons, the availability of weapons by terrorists would be much more difficult and reduced.

Conclusion:

The above paragraphs show that the Bush administration is a champion of democracy, development and denial for space of terrorism in word, if not always in deed. It provides a lesson in the distinction between the ideals and reality.

At every turn, the President speaks of the need to “spread freedom” and of “the transformational power of liberty”. The question is how precisely may freedom and liberty spread?

George Soros in his book “The Age of Fallibility” (2006) writes: “When President says that democracy will prevail, he really means that America will prevail.” To many the rhetorical promotion of freedom and democracy is merely a mask for the actual promotion of American economic and strategic interests.

New York Times columnist, Thomas Friedman, the 2002 Pulitzer Prize winner, wrote that “the hidden hand of the market will never work without the hidden fist—McDonald’s cannot flourish without McDonnell Douglas--the first designer of the F-15 aircraft and the hidden fist that keeps the world safe for Silicon Valley's technologies is called the US Army, Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps.””

President Clinton said: “American can lead the world...but we can’t dominate and run the world. There is a big difference.”