



CENTRE FOR LAND WARFARE STUDIES

SEMINAR ON

INDIA: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES ON THE EASTERN FLANK

AT

INDIA HABITAT CENTRE, NEW DELHI

ON 17 JULY 2013

SEMINAR REPORT

Centre for Land Warfare Studies (CLAWS) held a one day seminar on '**India - Opportunities and Challenges on the Eastern Flank**' at Gulmohar Hall, India Habitat Centre, New Delhi on 17 July 2013. The theme was conceptualised as part of CLAWS endeavour to look into the security scenarios in immediate neighbourhood and analyse their implications for India. The event spanned three sessions and covered the following issues:-

- I. **Session I** - Myanmar's domestic challenges and foreign relations in wake of the political and economic liberalisation which commenced in April 2012.
- II. **Session II** - Bangladesh: The influence of Islamist vs. secular discourse on bilateral relations. Also the influx of FDIs into Bangladesh and the status of longstanding issues with India.
- III. **Session III** - Integrating India: A paradigm of security and development of India's Northeast and headway made by the Look East Policy (LEP) and measures required to take it further, to keep pace with regional transformations.

Session I: Myanmar

Dr. Vibhanshu Shekar:

Myanmar's domestic challenges post April-2012.

Until not so long ago, Myanmar was known for not so good reasons. Military occupation, undemocratic rule, humanitarian disaster, drug trafficking, plunge into nuclear environment, multiple sub national insurgencies were embarking on a complex nation building process. Drivers of change are coming from within the army; it's more voluntary than coming outside from the international

system. Change in Myanmar appears to not be an expression of crisis or pressure but an expression of confidence within the military. There is perhaps a likelihood of Myanmar developing into either a Pakistan or Indonesian model of civil government i.e. dominated by the military. The Junta has unleashed a process where it may or may not have a control over the future. Two questions arise:-

- Is the military riding the tiger?
- Is Suu Kyi compromising too much to become the nation's President?

In the past, ASEAN pushed Myanmar to accept the Human Rights clause within its charter but Myanmar refused and threatened to withdraw. When US put sanctions, they joined hands with China. Myanmar's 2008 Constitution bars a person from elections if that person married a foreigner. Suu Kyi thus stands barred from elections on account of that clause. An amendment to Myanmar's constitution would be required if Suu Kyi is to be permitted to contest elections which in turn is required to be passed by a seventy five percent majority. Suu Kyi's presidential prospects are thus heavily dependent on military concurrence since they have 25 per cent of the seats.

Suu Kyi recently declared that she has a special place for military in her heart which has caused dissatisfaction amongst the young cadres in her party. Despite her undisputed leadership there has been a downward trend for her inexperience in active politics and her incapability to stand up for Muslim minorities in Myanmar. It remains to be seen if the military leadership is willing to reconcile. One constitutional amendment to accommodate her might open a floodgate of other amendments most of which concern ethnic minorities. Rise of ethno communal conflict may look like a new phenomenon but the animosity is deep seated and can be traced to the past. All these complex issues add up to one large question - how to build the country? So far the process has been incomplete with no clear cut consensus between military and pro-democracy elements. There is keenness to bring about a change but at what cost is still to be seen.

Ms Harnit Kaur

Myanmar's foreign relations post April-2012.

USA

Sanctions were a major aspect of US foreign policy in the post-cold-war era. They commenced in 1997 and were legislated at both the state and central levels. They became harsher in 2003, after an attack on Suu Kyi's motorcade – when all trade in US dollars was banned. Sanctions were in place till 2012 which meant visa ban, restriction on financial services, general and specific import bans, investment bans and assistance ban – (bilateral & multilateral). The sanctions brought no meaningful change in the human rights condition inside Myanmar. On the contrary, greater harm was done to US oil companies as greater space was allowed to British, French, Thai and Malay competitors.

Since US investment would have required direct engagement with government ministries, it was not feasible. Sanctions also eclipsed the interests of US NGOs interested in humanitarian work and Burmese expatriates seeking closer ties with family. The Obama era has been marked by the "sunshine policy" or the "action for action" approach which entails both dialogue engagement with

concurrent sanctions. Interestingly, USA maintains a blacklist of 100 persons (“specially designated nationals”) considered cronies of the former military regime with whom the treasury department prohibits trade. The most recent being Lt. General Thein Htay who violated UN arms embargo and engaged in arms deal with North Korea. The US is now clear that it is not targeting the government.

European Union (EU)

The EU response to the reformation process has been extremely positive. On 28 April 2012, it opened office in Yangon. On 14 May 2012, legal effect was given to a probationary period of one year. Apart from this 700,000 Euros were contributed to set up a Peace Centre that is meant to facilitate a peace process with Myanmar’s ethnic minorities. The following is what the EU seeks in Myanmar (goals):

- Regular dialogues on Human Rights.
- Protection of all minorities.
- End of hostilities in the Kachin state.
- Unconditional release of political prisoners.
- Reform of police service given president’s claim that all perpetrators of violence will be prosecuted.
- Unhindered access for all development and humanitarian aid workers.

Nonetheless the spate of violence in Rakhine state poses a challenge. The UK-Burma Campaign and Human Rights Watch have in particular critiqued EU for easing sanctions too soon. This is due to the violence against the Muslim Rohingya community which is understood to not be at the local level but alleged to have state planning and support.

China

Recent events indicate a good deal of initiative from China to maintain its ties with Myanmar in this transitional phase. In 2011, days prior to the historic visit of Secretary of State Hilary Clinton, Xi Jinping met Myanmar’s Military Chief and pledged closer ties. In Jan 2013 PLA Deputy Chief of General Staff, Qi Jianguo visited the capital Naypyidaw. In September 2012 an inauguration ceremony was held for a Myanmar national pavilion in Nanning of the Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region. On June 2013, a replication of the Sakamuni tooth relic stupa was donated by China to the Shwedagon Pagoda in Yangon. This was aimed at enhancing the ties among the powerful Military - Buddhist circles and increase soft power & cultural affinity.

In the energy sector, oil and gas pipelines with Myanmar are expected to considerably reduce cost of China’s energy imports and overcome dependence on the Strait of Malacca. As an example, PetroChina has signed a 30 year contract (active since 2009) with Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise (MOGE). This is expected to satisfy a quarter of China’s natural gas needs every year. The rest is being sourced from Central Asia. It will bring in USD 1.5 billion foreign exchange earnings to Myanmar, annually. However, all is not smooth for China. With democracy taking root, locals often protest the low compensation and lack of transparency of mining projects etc. Additionally, the multitude of competitors now entering Myanmar from East and West along with Myanmar’s own

strong sense of independence and nationalism will prevent China from entrenching overwhelming influence.

India

While India has had a head start in establishing joint initiatives with the Military Junta, it did not capitalise on opportunities in a speedy manner. For example, in the 1990s, development of the Kyaukpyu port (also of interest to China) was discussed with India. This would have provided sea access to India through Mizoram, into the Bay of Bengal. As of 2011, China commenced the construction of gas pipeline from Kyaukpyu to Kunming in the Yunnan province. Relative to China and Thailand's border trade and business development with Myanmar, India is lagging behind.

With the reformation process underway, trade/assistance are being emphasised in bilateral talks. In June 2013, Suu Kyi met Minister of Commerce and Industry Anand Sharma and urged developmental and infrastructural assistance including hospitals and education sector. She expressed that India's handloom industry has huge potential since natural cloth fibre is appreciated in Myanmar. On a separate matter, the July 2013 blasts in the Bodhgaya temple complex in Bihar has added a transnational context to the internal on going violence between Buddhists and Muslims; a matter that may be taken up in bilateral or tripartite engagements including Bangladesh.

Since taking office, President Thein Sein has issued prisoner amnesties on eight occasions freeing 30,000 prisoners including 800 political prisoners. Aung San Suu Kyi has expressed that she would like to run for president, but the 2008 constitution stands in the way. Some questions persist. Will there be economic empowerment of the people in resource rich provinces such as Kachin and Shan or will the money find its way into the pockets of the political class, with a chunk of the profits going out of the country? Given that the Junta ruled with an iron fist, what gives the government the confidence to handle and control rebel activities under a democratic construct? When it comes to socio political inclusion of people in the reform process the road has been and promises to be rocky.

Discussion

- Myanmar is anchored with ASEAN. Assumption of the ASEAN Chair in 2014 marks a great opportunity for Myanmar and the region.
- India's strategic space extends from the Hindu Kush to Irrawaddy. Hence, India must make use of multilateral forums such as BIMSTEC, East Asia Summit, ASEAN and bilateral engagements to promote its interest.
- India needs to collaborate with Japan which is offering huge technological capabilities to augment good historical relations with Myanmar.
- Myanmar needs development and humanitarian aid to be a liberal regime. India needs to be seen delivering on its promises and Indian agencies must improve their performance in projects undertaken by them. Projects like Kaladan which benefit no one should be avoided.
- Peaceful Myanmar is not possible unless they resolve the issue of ethnic conflict.
- Pro-democracy group and military have not developed a consensus on the Panglong Agreement.

- There is a need to stop looking at the East only from the security perspective. Market is playing a huge role. Many people from Myanmar come to Manipur to avail of the medical facilities there. There is need to expedite government policies so that the benefits can reach people of NE.

Session II: Bangladesh

Mr. Hiranmay Karlekar

Bangladesh's Nationalism and its Impact on Bilateral Relations

Upcoming Bangladesh elections will be critical for Indian interests. Nationalism and fundamentalism in Bangladesh has been latent for a long time. In 1971 war, nationalism surfaced in the form of liberation war and exploded again recently in the form of protests to try the war criminals. The government has been stable in the midst of violence. It remains to be seen if this event will impact the fortunes of Awami League in the forthcoming elections. Fundamentalism in Bangladesh means that only Muslims can participate in political affairs. Non-Muslims can enjoy rights under Islamic law, can conduct business, but cannot participate in the political process. Its roots can be found in Major General Zia's tenure which saw rapid Islamisation of Bangladesh and patronage to Jamaat. During the period of Begum Khalid Zia, many intellectuals were banished from the country.

It is the Jamaat's commitment to fundamentalist Islam, which recognises only the Muslim Umma and not nations, which makes for the ultimate inevitability of its conflict with Bangladeshi nationalism. Hence, to understand the influence of the secular/Islamist extremist dialectic on its character, one needs to look at the history of nationalism in undivided India, the emergence and crystallisation of Bengali nationalism in the midst of growing Islamist salience in Pakistan prior to the Liberation War, and the secular/Islamist extremist dialectic in Bangladesh since the Liberation.

If the political unification of India by the British created the territorial imperative of one nationhood, the introduction of Western education through instruction in the English medium led to the rise of a class of educated Indians whom J.H. Broomfield calls the 'Bhadralok' or genteel folk. The predominantly Hindu composition of the 'Bhadralok' in the 19th century and the frequent use of Hindu gods, religious idiom and symbols in their articulation of nationalism, however, prompted a large section of the Muslims to keep away. Muslims feared domination by Hindus who not only constituted the majority of the country's population but had occupied most of the positions in the British administration open to Indians because they had embraced English education and service while the Muslims, sulking over the loss of their status of rulers, stayed back.

Tagore's inclusive worldview visualised India as a place of pilgrimage where numerous races and cultures, pouring in through the ages, mingled and became one harmonious, celebratory ocean of diversity united in humanity. The attachment of the Muslim Bhadrakok to a culture whose broad contours were shaped by the ideas that Tagore and other humanists stood for, was deepened by the language movement and the assault on their culture, which was deemed un-Islamic by Pakistan's ruling establishment which, at one stage, had even banned the broadcasting of Tagore songs over

radio. The Jamaat is at the centre of Bangladesh's violent fundamentalist Islamist universe. The terrorist and other organisations mentioned are its creations, which are brought to the fore or shifted to the rear depending on exigencies. They were behind the relentless campaign of violence and murder against secular and pro-liberation elements, especially the Awami League's supporters between 2001 and 2006.

The Awami League's second coming in 2008 and particularly the trial of war criminals had put them on the defensive. Their infrastructure for unleashing violence, however, has remained intact and has been put to full use in the violent campaign against the trial of the war criminals and the Shahbagh movement since the middle of February. The confrontation has serious implication for not only the future of Bangladeshi nationalism which incorporates the values of secularism and democracy but India as well. The Jamaat is pathologically anti-India. Its defence policy not only identifies India as the only country that can attack Bangladesh but calls for imparting an anti-India orientation to its military and infusing it with the spirit of jihad against India. The installation of a BNP-led government with the Jamaat as a key coalition partner is bound to lead to renewed assistance to the secessionist outfits of north-eastern India, as during the two tenures of Begum Khaleda Zia as prime minister, but once again make Bangladesh a launching pad for terrorist strikes in this country.

The certain withdrawal of American forces from Afghanistan by the end of 2014 if not earlier, and the possible take-over of the latter by the Taliban, is likely to lead to, as indicated by Syed Saleem Shahzad, the noted Pakistani journalist, in 'Inside Al-Qaeda and the Taliban: Beyond Bin Laden and 9/11', to a massive escalation of terrorist incidents against this country with collusion between Jamaat and the ISI. In case of a conventional war with Pakistan, a sharp increase in terrorist strikes from Bangladesh may manifest especially along the Siliguri-Islampur corridor linking the rest of India with the Northeast.

Sanjay Bhardwaj

Bangladesh's long standing issues with India and its Economic Transformation

India seeks to support secular democratic forces in Bangladesh, given that the domestic political scenario determines its foreign policy towards India. Bangladesh society and polity are divided into two vertical forces. There is the Bangla linguistic nationalism which follows secular values and espouses closer ties with India. The other is the religious nationalism which follows a conservative Islamic dogma and is closer to Pakistan's ideological framework. It is notable that when the liberalrationalists come to power, they are supported by realists. This section of the political class seeks to resolve bilateral issues on an equal footing with India. They are impressed with India's economic headway and want to make it a partner for furthering development.

India'sNortheastcan play a significant role in improving sub-regional cooperation. It can serve as a gate-way for Bangladesh's access to India and may in the long run act as a 'game changer' in the Bangladesh-India trade and investment cooperation. At present the two countries are now poised to work together with Nepal and Bhutan within a framework of regional integrations. India's policy

perspective towards Bangladesh has shifted from unilateralism-bilateralism to multilateralism and for Bangladesh from competition to partnership.

If India genuinely wants to address the economic and security concerns, it has to work like a soft power. India can expand the concept of 'Gujral Doctrine' and adopt lenient approach (package deal) to resolve the bilateral disputes. India can also persuade Bangladesh to develop a consensus policy approach to avoid adhocism in bilateral relations.

Discussion

- **Conventional war:** A scenario where this may emerge is if ISI, Al Qaeda, Taliban and Jamaat converge to wage an unconventional war against India through 26/11 type attacks. However soft India's response may have been till date, under such a circumstance it will have to react. This may entail surgical strikes against terrorist hideouts in Pakistan and has potential of exploding into a conventional war. In such a situation, the presence of hostile government in Bangladesh has security implications for India.
- **Arms proliferation:** The easy availability and large scale proliferation of small arms and light weapons in Bangladesh and Southeast Asia should be a concern since it affects insurgency in India's Northeast.
- India should use multilateral forums like BCIM to engage with China.
- India must endeavour to support the favourable regime in Bangladesh. However, it must keep the dialogue going with the opposition parties as well.

Session III: Integrating India

Dr. Sanjoy Hazarika

Integrating the Northeast: A Paradigm for Security and Development

Despite numerous initiatives, India's Northeast remains underdeveloped. Major socio-economic & political gaps and 'Dependency Syndrome' still exists. Six basic deficits, four of which were identified by 'Shukla Commission' have still not been attended to. Divisions have been created by state. Northeast has experienced three partitions and four separations along with three major transfers of population. Borders are fragile, porous and insecure. Poor ability to manage borders has brought government into bad light. There is a long and extraordinary history of sadness that people do not forgive in Northeast; they try to forget but they are not able to. AFSPA draws public reaction and creates four classes of citizenship. Those protected by the Act, Those vulnerable to the people protected by the Act, not affected majority population and lastly extremely dangerous local police/forces which believe they are armed with impunity. Laws of separation also lead to a sense of alienation. They create a culture of inequality.

Floods and power disruption affects lakhs of people. In a year, four months are spent in recovering from floods and miseries caused by it. Human trafficking is growing. There is a fear in Northeast that you will either be at extracting point or dumping point. Ethnic conflicts and internal confrontations have taken a front seat in the regions arena of conflicts. Huge amount of grants and subsidies have not generated outcome. Problem with time zone is holding Northeast back, when much of the Northeast awakes, the rest of India is asleep. Look East Policy (LEP) will not work with defective policies and political leaders need to address this serious problem.

Brig. Narender Kumar

Integrating the Northeast: A Paradigm for Security and Development

The Northeast will be a springboard for Indian economy in the years ahead. It was once upon a time food bowl of India but over the years it has not got the requisite attention. We are trying to integrate the Northeast with rest of the country and beyond but we need to integrate it within itself, first. A military perspective outlines two cycles of insurgency. The first was ideological and second of self-seeking armed groups also called corporatisation of insurgency. There is the threat of a third cycle of insurgency (ideological) which may have Manipur or Assam as its epicentre.

A new kind of thought process is emanating in Northeast i.e. of structural and cultural violence (extortion, kidnapping, cartelisation, drugs, and weapons trade). This is divisive and unrelenting as space for reconciliation is limited and blocked. The answer to this problem is not the employment of security forces but in closing the perception gap between the policy makers and the people of the Northeast whose aspirations must be understood. Education in rural areas is proxy. Children want to go to school and parents want to send their children to school but parents don't have the money.

Eighty four percent of the population of the Northeast lives in rural areas and this is the strength of this land. Don't try to integrate it only with the rest of India, instead integrate the seven states together first. This can be done only by improving communication (internet & telecom) and connectivity (road & railways). One of the problems in Northeast is that there are no organised agencies that can take agricultural produce from farmers. Procurement is not available; people have no choice but to go back to black gold. Non availability of electricity is another problem. Bhutan, Bangladesh and Myanmar economy can be linked with India's Northeast by creating dry docks in Imphal, Manipur.

Dr. GVC Naidu

India's LEP: Current Status and steps required to achieve Vision 2020

At present there are two dominant trends in East Asia. There is enormous economic dynamism of an entire region spanning from India to Australia, an unprecedented development in world history. A reflection of this dynamism is the larger number of free trade and regional agreements (FTA) that countries are feverishly entering into. According to the Asian Development Bank, as of September 2012 there were 103 FTAs in effect involving one or more countries from the region, most of them bilateral. Consequently, its overall weight in global affairs is also increasing significantly, and hence developments here will have major implications for the rest of the world. There are serious security

challenges as well that can undermine regional stability such as maritime territorial disputes and the emergence of new power centres.

India is still stuck with a 'post-cold war' paradigm as a strategic referent, which is unsuited to explicate the current geostrategic environment. The U.S.-led unipolarity is over but a stable multi-polarity is yet to take shape. It is necessary to factor in the emergence of the Indo-Pacific as new geostrategic construct, underscoring the growing interface between the Indian Ocean and Pacific Oceans. This should suffice as India's own pivot to East Asia. The U.S. is strongly backing the Trans-Pacific partnership with Japan. Many others such as Mexico and Canada are also showing an interest. This will be another significant development in the coming years.

For India, it is inevitable that comparisons are made with China. Economically, China is fully integrated with the rest of East Asia. China is the largest trading partners for almost all the countries (including close American allies Japan and South Korea). China is also well placed to make full use of its long land borders through an excellent network of roads and rail links. Herein India has not worked sufficiently to improve its land connectivity. The current environment is advantageous to India as several countries such as the U.S., Japan and many ASEAN countries are favourably disposed and want India to play a larger role in regional affairs. As the Look East policy enters a crucial phase, it is time New Delhi started blazing all its guns with several major initiatives.

DISCUSSION:

- **Perception gap:** We have to utilise the emerging window of opportunity of doing more than what we have done. We need to acknowledge the tumultuous past even as we plan to forward. That will provide us with solid grounding.
- **Connectivity:** The NE does not need new policies but merely implementation. We are thinking on lines of connecting to other countries by building trans-boundary highways but first we need to build roads on our side of the border and improve intra-land connectivity among the seven sisters. The need of the hour is indeed connectivity.
- **Role of Department of NE Region (DoNER):** This department, though in being since 2004 has not made any significant contribution. It needs to be revamped. Achievable objectives and road map should be stated and their functioning should be periodically reviewed.
- **Regional Cooperation:** Initiatives such as BIMSTEC and BCIM should be reinvigorated to as regional cooperation is the engine for growth.
- **Defence Cooperation:** Defence cooperation with Bangladesh and Myanmar should be strengthened to deal with potential security situations.

Concluding Remarks by Director CLAWS

Maj Gen Dhruv C Katoch, SM, VSM, (Retd), Director CLAWS highlighted following issues:-

- There is a yawning gap between policy formulation and implementation.

- AFSPA is not the cause of malaise. It is the malaise which has brought AFSPA. Therefore, the core issues of development and people empowerment need to be addressed.
- LEP has not yielded desired result due to inconsistencies in policy implementation. India's East Asia pivot provides strategic space to India to pursue and expanding its interest.