



Asian Conflicts Reports

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The fall of Kilinochchi and after

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In recent history there has been only one example of an absolute military victory over a terrorist group: the destruction of Khalistan terror groups by India's security forces. Today the Khalistan terror groups are limited to a few diapora supporters in Canada, US and UK.

Sri Lanka is now at the threshold of securing a second absolute victory, by destroying the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. The defeat of the LTTE is much a success of the Sri Lankan military as it is a grave miscalculation by the LTTE.

The beginnings of the collapse can be traced to changes in LTTE strategy from 2004 onwards. In October 2004, a delegation of the LTTE headed by Suppayya Pramu Tamilselvan undertook a month long tour of Europe and held high level meeting with senior officials of Foreign Ministries in ten European countries. The meetings were arranged by Norwegian diplomats in each of these countries.

The LTTE had by this stage undergone a paradigm shift in thinking, after many years of pursuing a military strategy, they had come to believe the next phase towards statehood was the progressive achievement of international acceptance. The LTTE believed direct diplomatic access in Europe had paved the way for "Proto-State" status in the corridors of Western powers.

The LTTE had control of the Vanni region in the Northern Province and capability to influence the Jaffna peninsula. The LTTE had become over confident of its military capabilities and was ambitiously pursuing a strategy of diplomatic successes. Towards this end, the LTTE had already assassinated former Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar, thereby creating a dearth of internationally recognized personalities in the SLFP/JVP coalition. The LTTE were convinced that they would be favored over a SLFP/JVP coalition Presidency by the international community and this provided a better chance of achieving a level of legitimacy for the organization.

Realizing that UNP candidate Ranil Wickremesinghe may win the Presidential elections if the minority Tamils voted, the LTTE imposed a complete boycott of the Presidential elections in the Northern Province. As reported in the EU Election Observer Mission Report (Nov 2005), the LTTE successfully enforced a total boycott of the elections in areas controlled by them.

The final results of the Presidential elections, Mahinda Rajapaksa received 4,887,152 votes and Ranil Wickremesinghe 4,706,366. The SLFP/JVP candidate Mahinda Rajapaksa won the Presidential elections by 180,786 votes. The registered voters in the Northern Province that were prevented from voting by the LTTE exceed 400,000 persons.

As Sun Tzu in his book, Art of War writes "the opportunity of defeating the enemy is provided by the enemy himself". Indeed the LTTE being over confident of its military capabilities had grossly miscalculated strategy. It blatantly disregarded the capacity of the Sri Lankan state to mobilize a military campaign, and banked on diapora advice for a diplomatic offensive against Sri Lanka.

The LTTE strategy had not factored the arrival of Gotabaya Rajapaksa from the United States, the elder brother of President Mahinda Rajapaksa. Gotabaya a retired Colonel in the Sri Lanka Army actively participated in the battles of Vaddamarachchi in 1987. Gotabaya assumed office as Secretary of Defence and set about a strategy for the elimination of the LTTE drawing on his own experience on the battlefield. The "Gotabaya Strategy" was three pronged, the first priority was to enhance the manpower strength of the military. Between 2006-2008 the security forces expanded by 70,000 soldiers and the auxiliary civil defence force by 40,000 persons. The second element of the strategy was to destroy the weapons supply capability of the LTTE. In this regard the Navy played a pivotal role by destroying almost the entire shipping fleet of the LTTE. The Navy targeted these floating armories in international waters sinking seven large merchant vessels operated by the LTTE. The third element of the strategy was closer cooperation between the three armed forces. In the absence of a structured coordination process, Gotabaya used his personal relationships with senior commanders of the three services to ensure effective coordination at the operational level.

When the LTTE blocked the Mavil Aru reservoir in July 2006 preventing irrigation and water supply to rice fields downstream, the government was ready to use military force to evict the LTTE from the Eastern Province. The defection of LTTE Eastern leader Karuna had ⇒

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Sri Lanka is now on the threshold of securing a decisive victory over the LTTE

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The LTTE's defeat is the outcome of Sri Lanka's military strategies, but also miscalculations by the terrorist group

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Diasporic supporters of the LTTE could continue to support the organization



factionalized the LTTE in the Eastern Province. The security forces after one year of battle had totally liberated the Eastern Province with the final battle of Thoppigala in July 2007.

In February 2008, the security forces embarked on clearing the Northern Province, commencing with the battle of Madhu Church. Security Forces pursued a strategy of capturing coastline on the North Western and Eastern coast. This strategy of progressing along the coast prevented the LTTE from landing supplies, limited the operational space for the Sea Tigers and prevented and outflow of refugees to India.

In ten months the security forces had reached northern most town of Pooneryn on the western flank and had come almost to Mullaitivu on the Eastern flank. The three main offensive divisions were supplemented with additional manpower strength by establishing three more semi-strength divisions. At the time of the Kilinochchi battle three full divisions and three semi-strength divisions (Task Force) were positioned for attack from six directions. The Gotabaya Strategy of crippling the weapons supplies had prevented the LTTE from replenishing ammunition stocks. The LTTE could not prevent the advance of the security forces due to a serious shortage of ammunition. The LTTE was evicted from their prestigious stronghold of Kilinochchi (02 January 2009) considered the de-facto capital of the LTTE.

After the LTTE defences at Elephant Pass collapsed (08 January 2009) two additional divisions stationed in the Jaffna peninsula reached the battle ground on the mainland. At present, one division (55 Division) is moving south from the Jaffna peninsula, three full divisions (57 Division, 58 Division & 59 Division) and three semi-strength divisions (Task Force 2, 3, & 4) are positioned from the south and south-east. A four ring Naval cordon is positioned off the coast of Mullaitivu. The Security Forces entered Mullaitivu (25 January 2009), the last major town held by the LTTE. The LTTE had constructed several underground command & control facilities, fuel dumps and ordnance factories in areas surrounding Mullaitivu, all of which have now been captured by the Security Forces.

As the government continues to encircle the LTTE, the civilian population that has been displaced due to the conflict which numbers around 200,000 persons will need to be protected. According to a December 2008 Human Rights Watch Report, the LTTE is using the displaced population as a human shield and preventing them from leaving LTTE territory. The government will need to take extra precautions to minimise civilian casualties, especially be cautious of deceptive LTTE intelligence intended to precipitate a humanitarian disaster

The survival of the LTTE is completely dependent on the survival of its elusive leader Velupillai Prabhakaran. The LTTE is structured around an all powerful leader to whom all must take an oath of allegiance, and has no second-in-command. Therefore, the elimination or exile of Prabhakaran will create a power vacuum among the key commanders all of whom are of equal rank in the organization. There is a strong likelihood that elimination of Prabhakaran could splinter and factionalize the LTTE with key commanders operating independently of each other. In the current situation the fate of Prabhakaran can take three scenarios.

The contracting territory of the LTTE will make Prabhakaran more vulnerable. In fact over the last few weeks the human and technical intelligence on LTTE movements has increased several fold. On 12 January 2009, a former bodyguard of Prabhakaran was captured by the security forces and two underground hideouts of Prabhakaran were targeted with bunker-buster bombs. Therefore, the first scenario regarding the fate of Prabhakaran is that improved intelligence may lead to a surgical air or ground strike killing Prabhakaran in the next few weeks.

The second scenario is Prabhakaran fleeing into exile. The Tamil diaspora has been actively attempting to facilitate Prabhakaran's escape from Sri Lanka. It is possible that Prabhakaran may attempt to seek refuge in a South East Asian country. It is suspected that LTTE weapons procurement chief Kumaran Pathmanathan (KP) for whom several INTERPOL arrests warrants have been issued lives safely in South East Asia. Therefore, it is plausible that Prabhakaran be transported clandestinely to a South East Asian destination. The Tamil diaspora is of the view that Prabhakaran even in exile can provide inspirational leadership to remaining elements of the movement locally and overseas.

The third scenario is a mutiny within the LTTE in which Prabhakaran is killed by one of his own commanders. Already, the security forces are making overtures to senior LTTE commanders to defect. The success story of Karuna as a head of political party and now a member of Parliament may be viewed as an incentives for defection.

It is likely that the international network of the LTTE which remains active and strong will continue the battle for Tamil Eelam in exile. They will follow the same path as the Khalistan groups which have an active diasporic presence not have commensurate on-ground power. •

A Decade of 'Sunshine' in Korea: What's The Result?

Kongdan Oh Hassig



Mr. Kim Dae-jung, well-known as a crusader for democracy and a staunch opposition leader against the former military dictatorships of the Republic of Korea (ROK, or more commonly South Korea), was finally elected president of South Korea in December 1997. "Let's melt the frozen Cold War relationship between the two Koreas with warm sunshine," he said, taking a cue from the Aesop fable. President Kim's "Sunshine Policy" became South Korea's official policy toward its arch enemy and political rival, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK, or North Korea). The rationale of the new policy of reconciliation and cooperation with North Korea was simple and sincere: If the North Koreans (or more specifically, the ruling Kim Jong-il regime) can be convinced that South Koreans wish them no harm, they will come to trust them. Another, less obvious goal of the Sunshine Policy was to make the North Koreans dependent on South Korean aid, trade, and investment, so even if they did not come to completely trust the South Koreans, they would be virtually forced to cooperate with them.

The new policy was implemented by the ROK's Ministry of Unification, whose stature was enhanced by making the Unification Minister the Chair of the National Security Council. With political power and a large budget, the Ministry of Unification was able to extend all kinds of political and economic offers to North Korea. Rice, fertilizer, medicine, consumer goods, and cash began flowing to North Korea. Propaganda broadcasts were halted. Most South Koreans, tired of fifty years of cold war against the North, welcomed the Sunshine Policy. Washington, Beijing, Tokyo, Moscow, and the European Union supported the new policy, with the expectation, or at least hope, that it would change the attitude of the North Korean regime and bring political stability to Northeast Asia.

The Sunshine Policy seemed to be working. In 2000, North Korea's Kim Jong-il agreed to convene the first inter-Korean summit meeting with his counterpart, President Kim Dae-jung. The meeting went well, and tearful Koreans on both sides of the border, and overseas as well, believed that the first serious step had been taken toward national reconciliation, and that reunification was just a matter of time. Watching the summit on American television, I could hardly hold back my tears, for my family was one of the 11 million families that were divided by the border, and none of us had heard from our Northern family in half a century. At the summit, the North Koreans agreed to institute a modest program that would allow a few hundred families at a time to hold reunions

It turned out that the summit meeting was made possible at least in part by the raw self-interest of the North Korean leaders. The U.S. Congressional Research Service was the first to report that President Kim and his advisors had secretly handed over nearly a half billion dollars in cash to representatives of Kim Jong-il as a special thank-you present. This fact was initially denied by the Kim Dae-jung government, but later described as some sort of investment in North Korea. Skeptics began to criticize Sunshine Policy, saying that it only warmed the deep pockets of Kim Jong-il and his top cadres, not the poor and starving ordinary North Koreans. However, President Kim and his key advisors appeared genuinely believe that Kim Jong-il and his associates would eventually change their attitude toward South Korea. As of 2009, the total sum of South Korean aid to North Korea since the inception of the Sunshine Policy is estimated at around \$1.2 billion, not including donations from private South Korean citizens and overseas Koreans. Given that the North Korean GDP is in the range of \$10 to \$20 billion, the South Korean aid is significant.

Since the inception of the Sunshine Policy, meetings between North and South Koreans have become very common. The busiest bureau of the Ministry of Unification is the Bureau of North-South Dialogue, later renamed the Bureau of North-South Cooperation. Its senior policy makers and working level staff have frequently visited Pyongyang, and less frequently North Koreans visit Seoul. Family reunions occurred about twice a year, but not on a widespread scale due to the fear of the Kim Jong-il regime that North Korean citizens who meet their family members from the South would observe the "real" South Korea, which has always been described by North Korean propaganda as an impoverished country enslaved by the American "imperialists." The North Korean regime used the reunions as bait to keep the aid from South Korea flowing.

A second inter-Korean summit was held in August 2007. That time, South Korean President Roh Mu-hyun agreed to travel to Pyongyang, even though at the first summit Kim Jong-il had agreed to make a visit to Seoul. Skeptics had always doubted that Kim would ever make the trip to Seoul, at least without receiving an enormous payment, because a visit to the South would⇒

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Hopes for reconciliation and reunification have faded in South Korea

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North Korea is now seen as a long-term headache

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North Korea will not change its basic policies. Aid to the regime will simply prolong its life



acknowledge that the South Korean is a legitimate political partner of the North (something the North Korean regime has yet to admit), and perhaps because Kim is afraid of being the target of South Korean public anger or even assassination. President Roh adhered to the same North Korea policy as President Kim Dae-jung, only discarding “Sunshine Policy” as official name and calling it the Policy of Reconciliation and Peaceful Coexistence. The second summit produced nothing new in terms of reconciliation, and an increasing number of South Koreans and Koreans overseas began to express their frustration with the policy. Nevertheless, President Roh held to it steadily, and seemed to be even more accommodating toward North Korea than President Kim Dae-jung had been.

In 2008, a president from the opposition Grand National Party (GNP) was elected. President Lee Myong-bak was the former mayor of Seoul, and a former businessman who took a pragmatic view of North Korea policy, demanding that South Korean initiatives be reciprocated by the regime in the North. North Korea had all along condemned the GNP as a party of traitors to the Korean nation, and within a few months after Lee’s election, he was personally branded as a traitor by the North Koreans. Lee insisted on reviewing all aid and investment deals, which angered the North Koreans who had become used to a free ride.

In the last year, the North Koreans have virtually ended all official contact with the South Korean government. Moreover, they have gone a long way toward ending business deals with the South, which have proved to be highly lucrative to the North. The North Koreans have even refused to accept South Korean aid. The across-the-board shut-down in relations seems to be aimed at stirring the South Korean public against the Lee government to the extent of impeaching President Roh and bringing the former political party back to power. This is not likely to happen, and perhaps the North Koreans are beginning to realize this. In late 2008 there were indications that the North Korean official in charge of inter-Korean relations had been sacked, perhaps for giving bad advice to Kim Jong-il.

After a decade of warm sunshine, Kim Jong-il and his associates are more hostile than ever to the South Korean government. Neither the trust-building contacts nor the billions of dollars in aid and investment seem to have moved them. They have, however, developed skills in manipulating South Korea to support the North Korean regime. As long as China keeps aid flowing to the North Koreans, they can probably do without South Korea.

Will the South Koreans ever regain their faith in the Sunshine Policy? Hopes for reconciliation and reunification have receded in South Korea. North Korea is viewed as a long-term headache, and there are few who expect any change in Kim Jong-il or the current crop of top North Korean officials and military officers. True, the ordinary North Korean people, who endured a famine in the late 1990s, no longer expect change from their own government, but they remain powerless to influence North Korea’s policy toward the South. The only way they can vote is by defecting.

Over the last ten years, the United States has viewed North Korea as a nuclear proliferation problem, and has instituted its own reconciliation and aid program in an attempt to persuade the North Koreans to give up their nuclear weapons. This policy has delivered diminishing returns, and among North Korean experts there is little expectation that the North Koreans are about to give up their nuclear program. Consequently, American aid to North Korea has slowed. The Japanese, worried about the nuclear program as well, but even more concerned about getting the North Korean government to come clean about its past program of abducting Japanese citizens, is in no mood to extend aid to North Korea. This leaves only the Chinese, and to a much lesser extent, the Russians as North Korea’s perennial benefactors.

It is too soon to tell how the new Obama administration will treat North Korea. There is always a tendency among new administrations to believe they can succeed where their predecessors have failed. Quite possibly the Obama team will try to re-engage the North Koreans, and offer them a new deal of incentives. But the failure of ten years of Sunshine Policy should be considered as strong evidence that North Korea will not change its basic policies, and that any aid to the regime will simply prolong its existence. •

The Bangladesh General Elections: Implications

Ishtiaque Selim



The landslide victory of the Awami League (AL)-led grand alliance in the much awaited general election, held on 29 December 2008, is expected to bring about a change in the political environment of Bangladesh. The grand alliance, by winning 262 seats in the elections, has secured an absolute parliamentary majority. On the other hand, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)-led four party alliance suffered a humiliating defeat in the polls, winning only 32 seats.

What explains the defeat of BNP or, in other words, what factors led to the resounding victory of AL? A number of problems plagued the BNP-led government. First, the BNP administration did not deal effectively with the soaring price of food and other essentials, compounding the hardship of poor and common people. Second, corruption and abuse of power had become rampant within the BNP leadership. Third, the dismal state of law and order prevailed throughout the last BNP government's rule. During the election campaign, BNP failed to acknowledge its failures. Moreover, it had come under heavy criticism for its association with Jamaat-e-Islami, a party associated with political violence as well as for its nomination of some known corrupt and controversial politicians. All these factors, still fresh in the minds of voters worked against BNP in the general election.

By contrast, AL's election campaign was mature and well-planned. The party focused on the issues of paramount importance to the common people – controlling prices of food and oil, creating employment, and improving power supply, among others. The AL promise to bring alleged terrorists to trial and its inclusion of vision 2021 to the election manifesto also helped it regain control of the government. Vision 2021 appeals in particular to young people, who accounted for roughly 32 per cent of AL's total vote tally. These young voters are widely perceived as a decisive factor in the outcome of the election.

Needless to say, the AL government faces the daunting challenge of delivering on all the promises they made in the course of the victory. The government's first priority will be to check rising prices of food and other basic commodities to a level affordable for the common people. The second priority will be the anti-corruption drive. Institutional reform and promotion of ethical awareness could help. Another crucial step is to take action to slow the deterioration of law and order. The new government must also make developing the energy sector a high priority. The last regime's tenure saw no increase in production allowing the electrical grid to sink into a miserable state. Finally, trying accused perpetrators of political violence will be another challenge for the government. And all of this will have to be done while the AL government confronts the challenge of improving the economy in the midst of a global recession.

AL's accession to power has undoubtedly ushered in an era of hope and promise in Bangladesh. Will the AL-led government bring about much needed change in the politics of Bangladesh? Or, will AL's overwhelming majority in parliament prove dangerous to democracy in the long run? Will the government be able to curb corruption and improve law and order? Will the victory result in some degree of political stability in Bangladesh?

Evidence suggests that AL, following the elections, will at least try to inject a culture of cooperation into the politics of Bangladesh by abandoning confrontational politics. In 2001, BNP, like AL, swept to power with absolute majority in the parliament, but that party failed to live up to the expectations it has created. Perhaps a sense of arrogance crept into the mindset of BNP leadership. Partisanship was preferred over the general welfare. Accountability and transparency were absent from policy making. Suppression of opposition parties and abuse of human rights became regular occurrences. When the people's time came, they rejected BNP outright. The election results also delivered a stern warning to AL, the victorious party, that if it fails to sideline party interest and use political power and supremacy responsibly, then the next election results will be fateful for AL. It seems, so far, that the AL leadership understands this. Sheikh Hasina, the current Prime Minister (PM) and Chief of AL, in her statements sounds quite rational and reasonable. She has already pledged to work in unison with the opposition in parliament to strengthen democracy and develop the nation. In her first post-election press conference, she said, "We want to see that the AL, once it forms the government, will take the opposition, no matter how small, into confidence in tackling every national issue and shaping ⇒

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The Awami League's victory has ushered in an era of hope in Bangladesh

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Bangladesh premier Sheikh Hasina's government is likely to come down hard on religious extremism

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The government is likely to work to resolve outstanding issues with India, and improve ties with the USA



state policy.” To accommodate the opposition parties, the Bangladesh Premier has also hinted that she might offer BNP the post of Deputy Speaker in the parliament. This attitude, on the part of the government, could go a long way in making the parliament effective.

An effective parliament should promote stability in domestic politics. However, its effectiveness in this regard also depends on the responsible conduct of the opposition parties, which have as important a role as the ruling party in ensuring stability in politics. Realistically speaking, however, one can hardly be optimistic about political stability in post-election Bangladesh. The BNP has already challenged the poll results, as did AL in 2001. It appears, for now, that BNP will join the parliament, but, the past record of main opposition parties in parliament suggests there is a possibility that BNP will walking out. Headline grabbing protests and confrontations at the party workers’ level might become regular occurrences. All these, in turn, could result in BNP boycotting parliament leaving little room for stability in politics in the long run.

The formation of the new cabinet, which includes fresh faces as new ministers indicates that the AL-led administration is likely to take effective measures to curb corruption. Notably, for the first time in South Asia, two women have been entrusted with the duties of leading the vital portfolios of the Home and Foreign Ministries. Despite the new cabinet being criticized for the relative lack of experience, it is at the same time widely acclaimed for including people who have no record of corruption or criminal activities.

The media will play an important role in curbing political corruption. In the glare of wide media coverage and vigilance, it is unlikely that corruption in the current government will go unnoticed. BNP simply ignored the media coverage on its corruption, and that attitude ultimately proved disastrous for the party. Keeping all this in mind, one can assume that AL is not likely to walk in BNP’s shoes concerning corruption.

Sheikh Hasina is expected to come down hard on extremists since she and her party have, in the past, been among the militant’s targets. She has also emphasized regional cooperation, urging the creation of a South Asian task force for combined action against terrorism and religious extremism.

Agriculture in the AL era will also receive considerable emphasis. The AL leadership has stressed the need for subsidies on diesel fuel and fertilizer to boost agriculture production. The appointment of Matia Chowdhury who, as Agriculture Minister, efficiently ran that ministry from 1996 to 2001, is likely to revamp this crucial sector.

AL’s overwhelming victory has already had an effect on food and oil prices – wholesale prices of these commodities began to decline in the first week of January. It now remains to be seen how the current government will reduce the prices in the long run in the face of syndicates and cartels. Since addressing price hikes is a primary concern of AL, some sort of market intervention is in the cards. Otherwise, it will not be easy for the AL government to escape BNP’s fate in the next elections.

On the external front, AL, unlike the previous BNP government, is expected to engage with India to resolve some outstanding issues. Historically, AL governments have maintained friendly ties with India. In 1996, the AL-led administration and India entered into a 30 years Ganges Water Treaty and concluded Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord in 1997. Still, Bangladesh and India have a host of outstanding irritants between themselves. The immediate issues on the negotiating table are containing terrorism, solving maritime disputes, developing trade cooperation, and limiting border clashes. The current government may intensively engage in dialogues and consultations with India to address these issues. The understanding between India and the AL-led government would enable Bangladeshi diplomats to develop bargaining positions that serve the best interest of the country. Apart from India, good ties with China, another rising Asian giant, are important and beneficial for Bangladesh. In terms of imports and defense cooperation, China occupies a significant place in the foreign relations of Bangladesh. It is important for the Sheikh Hasina-led government to bear in mind that overfriendliness with India could jeopardize Bangladesh’s excellent relations with China. Thus, it would be better for the new government to maintain equidistance between China and India.

No less important are Bangladesh’s relations with the USA. It may be important to note that in recent times both Bangladesh and the US have undergone changes in political leadership. The new administration in Bangladesh, with its vision bringing about political and economic change, could try to find avenues of cooperation with the new US government. In particular, the Bangladesh government finds cause for optimism in the appointment of Hilary Clinton, a well-wisher of Bangladesh, as the new President Barack Obama’s Secretary of State. •

Is a Mumbai-type attack likely in the Philippines?

Rommel C. Banlaoi



Although the terrorist attack in Mumbai on 27 November 2008 was a South Asian security concern, there is a tremendous fear that a copy-cat assault might occur in Southeast Asia because of the continued presence in the region of known terrorist groups that share the violent extremist ideology of Al-Qaeda.

The focus of such concern in the Philippines is the continuing presence of Jemaah Islamiya (JI) operatives who, based on intelligence reports, are being harbored by the notorious Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) and rogue personalities of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF).

The security anxiety brought by the Mumbai attack is aggravated by the fact that the Philippines has been a victim of various terrorist carnage like the 30 December 2000 “Rizal Day Bombing”, the 27 February 2004 “Super Ferry 14 Bombing”, and the 14 February 2005 “Valentines Day Bombing”. These three terrorist incidents alone resulted in the death of around 200 persons and the wounding of at least 1,000 others.

A Mumbai-type attack can happen anywhere, anytime. But is such an attack likely to occur in the Philippines in the near future? Probably not, for a number of reasons

First, the tactical capabilities of Philippine insurgent groups have evolved along a different path than those of violent extremist groups in South Asia. Philippine Muslim militants embracing the virulent ideology of Al-Qaeda have not formed a group of mujahedeen capable of mounting a commando-type attack. ASG has urban bombers, but it does not have yet an urban commando capability.

The MILF has commando units. But MILF commandos are operating almost exclusively in the jungles of Central Mindanao. As a result, while these commandos have superior knowledge of jungle warfare, they have no experience in urban operations. JI, the ASG, and the rogue factions of the MILF have not yet trained a team of well-experienced paramilitary-intelligence commando fighters capable of mounting an attack similar to Mumbai in someplace like Metro Manila. Though military intelligence claimed that the ASG used to be called Mujahedeen Commando Freedom Fighters (MCCF), organized by Abdurajak Janjalani in the late 1980s, that group failed to actually form a cadre of commando-type mujahedeen and rapidly degenerated into a kidnap-for-ransom group soon after the death of its founder. The ASG has since only created a bunch of jungle fighters whose skills in warfare is far below the standard of the Philippine Marines, the Scout Rangers, and the Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) team of the Philippine National Police (PNP).

Second, to the extent that Philippine insurgents have developed commando-type capabilities, their focus has been on rural/jungle rather than urban operations. Though Mindanao has been experiencing minor bombing attacks from insurgent and terrorist groups, the Philippines has not experienced any high profile terrorist attacks in major urban areas since the Valentines Day bombings in 2005. Among the rebel groups in the Philippines, only the New People’s Army (NPA) has vast experience in urban combat. But the NPA has abandoned its urban strategy to re-affirm its principle of “encircling the center from the country sides.”

Third, the in-country training capabilities of Philippine groups focus primarily on bomb-making and rural commando operations; they probably lack the financial resources to “retool” for urban combat training or send cadres for such training abroad. Khadaffy Janjalani, the second ASG Amir, dreamed of creating an “Urban Squad” in 2004 to pursue “Urban Terrorism”. But what he created were teams of urban bombers with expertise in using Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs). Trained by JI in the Philippines, these teams were responsible for a series of bombings in Manila in 2004 and 2005. These urban bombers collaborated with some members of the Rajah Solaiman Islamic Movement (RSIM), a group of militant Muslim reverts operating in Luzon.

Organizing an urban commando of Muslim fighters would require huge financial resources, rigorous training in special urban warfare, and a cadre of highly motivated fighters with strong self-discipline and a willingness to fight to the death. ⇒

1 A Mumbai-type terrorist attack is not probable in the Philippines

2 Islamist terror groups in the Philippines do not have the capabilities needed for such an attack

3 The Philippines has a three-phase plan to deter terrorist attacks in urban areas



Fourth, there are no indications that Philippine groups have access to the kind of operational familiarity with major urban areas or the technical savvy that the Mumbai attackers had – for example, their use of Google earth to plan and rehearse their ingress into Mumbai.

But just because the probability of a Mumbai-style attack in the Philippines seems low at present, there is no reason to be complacent. The challenge to the Philippine government is to effectively prevent the rise of urban commando mujahideen to emerge in the country.

To enhance state preparedness against terrorist attacks in the urban areas, the Philippines adopted a defense system composed of three distinct phases: intelligence, target hardening and incident management.

- *The intelligence phase* adopts broad and focused approaches. The broad approach engages the local chief executives and community leaders in partnership with local police forces in intelligence gathering. This is most valuable in proactive measures like identifying potential targets, reporting suspicious persons and material, unusual movements (such as unusual delivery of large amount of ammonium nitrate) etc. and other clandestine activities in the communities. There were indications that the Mumbai bombers had some insider assistance within the two targeted hotels who provided information regarding floor plans and may even have prepositioned ammunition and food. Intelligence can identify high value targets and look out for similar activity. The government shall also strengthen its ground intelligence in order to counter the ground intelligence of the enemy.

- *The target hardening phase* aims to make it difficult for the terrorist to succeed in hitting their targets. Once the potential terrorist target is identified, government agencies, the private sector as well as the community work closely together to set up a security umbrella, within the internal and external environs of the target. There were indications that the Taj Hotel had received intelligence warnings of a likely attack in the weeks leading up to the attack and had stepped up its security screening. Finding the burden onerous to hotel staff and guests, and perhaps lulled into complacency by the failure of attacks to materialize, the hotel lifted its security screening just days before the attacks. It is important to find new ways to provide constant security screening for these types of high profile, high value targets.

- *The incident management phase.* In this phase, the sequence of actions to be undertaken in case of terrorist attack is carefully planned and calculated in order to mitigate the effects of attacks and return to normalcy. In like manner, this involves partnership among the security forces, local governments and the community. The local governments take the lead role. A number of problems with the incident response emerged during the Mumbai attacks. In particular, the amount of time it took for special anti-terrorist units to reach Mumbai. Moreover, the local security forces did not have a plan for managing the media, so for several hours local and international news networks were broadcasting real-time video of the attack and response that could well have provided valuable operational intelligence to the attackers. •

Countering Nuclear Smuggling

Anthony Fainberg and Caroline F. Ziemke



The Council on Asian Threat Research held a day-long roundtable in Tokyo on November 14, 2008 on nuclear smuggling and the possible links between transnational criminal activities and WMD terrorism in South and Southeast Asia. The discussion focused on the prospects for building effective multilateral cooperation on detecting and countering the spread of mass effects weapons across Asia. Multilateral security agreements exist in Asia, but they are not nearly as effective as they need to be. Despite high-minded pronouncements from such multilateral forums as the Asian Regional Forum (ARF), the Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific (CSCAP), and the South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), actual operational capabilities tend to be patchy and ad hoc. There is a real risk that by producing ambitious but toothless pronouncements, such forums undermine cooperation by creating the impression of action without actually delivering improved security.

History shows that effective cooperation is possible when local security and enforcement agencies have experience of regional bilateral or multilateral contact. In the case of the 2002 and 2005 Bali bombings, for example, local Indonesian law enforcement worked extremely effectively with Australian forensic examiners to investigate and identify the perpetrators. In stark contrast, valuable time was lost in investigating the 2007 Glasgow airport bombing because UK, Australian, and Indian law enforcement and intelligence agencies lacked such operational links and were slow to cooperate in investigating the international dimensions of the attack, despite good high-level intentions. A clear lesson is that formal, top-down cooperative agreements tend to be well-meaning but ineffective while ground-up, cop-to-cop contacts are much more effective during crisis responses.

The CATR roundtable identified three key barriers to the construction of effective nuclear detection / counter smuggling regimes for Asia:

1. A long history of national intelligence establishments interfering in the internal affairs of their neighbors that has bred deep resentment and mistrust.
2. A general perception that some countries – especially the United States – routinely hold back valuable intelligence or refuse to back “tips” with solid information on sourcing. Sharing is not truly reciprocal and partners are expected to trust and act upon intelligence that is not fully sourced and, at times, proves to be unreliable.
3. Endemic corruption, especially at the grassroots, operational level.

The best way to overcome these barriers is through operational cooperation in response to clearly-defined, shared threats from transnational terrorist and criminal organizations. Such operational cooperation can go far toward building trust that can, in time, flow up the chain-of-command and result in more effective formal, government-to-government agreements. Cooperative mechanisms can start by tackling narrowly-defined threats, such as has been the case with MALSINDO (Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia) anti-piracy operations in the Straits of Malacca. Other limited efforts, such as the Container Security Initiative (CSI) have met with some success. But if goals and requirements over-reach or do not require full reciprocal disclosure, as has been the case with the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI), success is less likely. Operational cooperation at the ground level also has the advantage of timeliness – more formal mechanisms often include cumbersome notification processes that burn valuable time in a crisis.

A fundamental question facing counter-nuclear smuggling efforts is whether transnational criminal organizations might plausibly collaborate with terrorist or insurgent groups in such activities. The majority of mainstream criminal organizations would be reluctant to risk the international notoriety and intense law-enforcement attention that even the hint of such activity would attract. Still, a few criminal groups – like the Dawood Ibrahim Organization (DIO), which has established ties with al-Qaida and JI – may perceive ideological or financial benefits that justify taking such risks. Perhaps the most high profile of these was the A. Q. Khan network, which smuggled nuclear technology and know-how (although not actual weapons or nuclear material) for profit but with clear ideological motivations. The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), which runs extensive shipping and smuggling networks in Southeast Asia, had past business dealings with jihadist groups in the region; the Japanese terrorist cult Aum ⇒

1 Multilateral security arrangements exist in Asia but are not as effective as they need to be.

2 CATR identified three key barriers to effective nuclear detection and counter-smuggling regimes in Asia

3 These barriers can be overcome through operational cooperation against transnational threats



Shinrikyo is known to have had ties to Yazuka criminal organizations; and there have been economic ties between insurgent groups and weapons- and drug-smuggling networks in Southern Thailand, Kashmir, and Afghanistan.

For many countries in the region, the presence of extensive ethnic and diaspora business connections further complicates the equation. The Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora has been a valuable tool for LTTE fund-raising and smuggling activities, but this is just one example.

While business links between criminal and terrorist/insurgent activities clearly exist, apart from the conventional weapons and drug trades, they are still rare and tenuous. The challenges for counter-smuggling efforts are: first, to facilitate intelligence-sharing to enable better tracking of the transnational activities of terrorist/insurgent and criminal organizations and, second, to develop financial and technical counter-smuggling measures that will make it more difficult and risky for criminal organizations to cooperate with terrorist organizations seeking to obtain or move advanced, mass effects weapons or materials.

For the most part, the active smuggling routes in Asia are well-known and well-established and known. Among the most important and worrisome are the many routes across the Pakistani-Afghan border and the set of paths leading through the Chittagong Hills to Cox's Bazaar in Bangladesh. Complicating the challenge of counter-smuggling is the fact that the most active smuggling routes operative through the many ungoverned spaces in South and Southeast Asia, such as the Pakistan-Afghan border, parts of the Indonesian archipelago, and the sea lanes between Borneo and the Philippines. North Korea has used another set of well-trodden smuggling routes in Southeast Asia (Laos, Cambodia, and Thailand, plus Taiwan) to transport nuclear-related equipment. While many of the regional experts taking part in the discussion cite Central Asia and Pakistan as the most pressing area of concern regarding nuclear smuggling, there was a general consensus that extensive analysis of likely smuggling routes from these regions to more distant parts of the world is needed.

A variety of radiation detection security equipment is currently used both in the United States and in other countries. In addition, more advanced technologies are being developed with the intention of improving detection capabilities and reducing false alarm rates. Some of the current devices are deployed through programs run by U.S. agencies in cooperation with international partners. Examples are the U.S. Department of Energy's Second Line of Defense Program, along borders of former Soviet states, and the Megaports program, at major ports throughout the world, including Port Qasim in Pakistan, the Port of Singapore, and the Port of Colombo. Other programs are under the aegis of U.S. Customs and Border Protection, which has deployed similar equipment both in the United States and overseas. This sort of equipment requires a moderate amount of training of an educated (secondary school level) technician to operate effectively. It also requires fairly sophisticated maintenance capabilities to keep functioning for long periods of time in environmentally stressful locations.

The United States government envisions an architecture comprised of systems of such nuclear detection equipment as a prime tool for detecting the smuggling of nuclear materials across international borders towards a potentially far-off target. The consensus of the roundtable participants was that the establishment of a US-led Global Nuclear Detection Architecture for South and Southeast Asia is a realistic goal provided a few important issues are adequately addressed:

- Any detection equipment would have to be operated by local officials, not by U.S. technicians within the country in question.
- Low- and mid-ranking customs and other law enforcement officials in these regions are not currently educated or practiced in such technology. As a result, substantial training and education would be required to develop a useful level of capability.
- Residual suspicion that detectors and other equipment donated by the US contain electronics that could be used to spy on the host nation would have to be assuaged.
- States in the region might be more interested in participating if they thought that the technology could also be used for border control purposes.
- Verification of the intelligence upon which operational cooperation is based must be built into the system. If shared intelligence is seen to be credible, trust will grow.

The widely expressed view in this group was that the exercise of more US soft power – especially a greater willingness to behave more collaboratively than it has in recent years – will go far toward facilitating effective regional cooperation in many fields, including those, like nuclear smuggling, in which US interests far outweigh their own. •

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