

BANGLADESH and Its Security Relationship with External Powers

Anand Kumar



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*For My Wife Nisha
and
Children Yashi
and
Shaurya*

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I hope this volume will contribute to a better understanding of the defence and security relationship of Bangladesh with its external partners.

1. Introduction

A state's security is heavily dependent upon its geopolitical environment. The geopolitical setting may either help augment national capabilities or increase the vulnerability of a state vis-à-vis its adversaries. When Bangladesh was born in 1971 as a new, independent nation in South Asia, it changed the geo-political environment of South Asia. India already faces a hostile neighbour on its western border. In the north, China is a major threat. In this geopolitical setting the kind of relationship India has developed with Bangladesh becomes important. Though Bangladesh is less of a problem for India than Pakistan or China, the relationship is far from being stable. Some of the steps taken by Bangladesh purportedly to enhance its own security have meant that the security environment in the region has actually deteriorated. Bangladesh's security relationship with other major powers has significant implications for Indian security, and therefore it becomes important to understand the security interests and interests of its major defence partners.

Bangladesh, a Muslim majority nation was liberated from Pakistan on 16 December 1971. The birth of Bangladesh was seen by some as a challenge to the two-nation theory, on the basis of which the sub-continent was partitioned. The first seeds of discontent were sown in East Pakistan when Urdu was sought to be imposed on Bengali-speaking people, which formed the basis for linguistic nationalism. The discontent however, had largely political and economic causes. Politically, had Mujib-ur-Rahman been allowed to be the prime minister of a united Pakistan, many argue that the liberation struggle for Bangladesh would not have taken place. This

background is seen as important in examining the often interrelated foreign and defence policies of Bangladesh.

Bangladesh did not perceive its national security being threatened by any country in the initial years after the liberation war, as only India and Myanmar share their land border with it. India, which surrounds it from three sides and shares a land border of 4,095 km, had helped the country overthrow the oppressive regime of the West Pakistani military rulers and elites and helped Bangladesh find its feet in the global state system.

India's help in the liberation of Bangladesh and its contribution has now been duly recognised by the incumbent Sheikh Hasina government which has honoured Indian war veterans and acknowledged the supreme sacrifice of over 1600 Indian soldiers.¹ When Bangladesh celebrated its 40th anniversary of its foundation in 2011, the Sheikh Hasina government decided to confer the Bangladesh Swadhinata Sammanona posthumously on Indira Gandhi for her "outstanding contribution" to the country's independence from Pakistan.² However, the delay in doing so serves as an indicator of the complex security dynamics that prevail within the country.

Though Bangladesh gained its independence from Pakistan, it remains a deeply divided country, with the prevalence of pro-liberation as well as anti-liberation forces in equal measure, vying for an upper hand in domestic politics with a dramatically different worldview. Unfortunately, in the decades after the liberation, if anything, the anti-liberation forces have become stronger and they, along with the deep state comprising the army, bureaucracy and intelligence agencies, currently define the security interests of Bangladesh.

The coup of August 1975 marked a major shift in the way Bangladesh perceived its foreign and defence policies. India, its supporter in the liberation war, was now presented as the main threat to national security; it suited the political purpose of the military rulers who usurped power after August 1975 as well as army, bureaucracy and intelligence agencies. Though political relations between India and Bangladesh improve whenever the Sheikh Hasina-

led Awami League comes to power, the threat perception defined by the deep state remains intact. A deep state is a body of people who generally create secret and unauthorised networks of power operating independently of a state's political leadership in pursuit of their own agenda and goals. In the case of Bangladesh it consists of influential members of intelligence agencies, military, police and bureaucracy who are involved in secret manipulation or control of government policy. A country's defence policy and defence-related procurements depend on the threat perception of that country. Bangladesh, despite being a poor country, has tried to acquire significant defence capability mainly due to its perceived sense of insecurity and perceptibly, to participate in the United Nations peacekeeping operations. Its defence procurement has increased in recent times.

This book argues that once the initial bonhomie subsided after the liberation war, the policymakers of Bangladesh and its deep state took a hard-nosed view of the geo-political and geo-strategic environment in the Indian sub-continent and considered India as a possible threat to the security and sovereignty of Bangladesh. To meet this possible challenge they embarked on an India-containment strategy, wherein China has been used as a defence partner and a counter-balance. This is also the reason why Bangladesh has opted for a symbolic defence relationship with India despite significant improvement in the bilateral relationship at the political level. Other major defence partners like Russia and the United States have been primarily used to source weapons for the UN peacekeeping operations.

In this book the word 'security' is used in the traditional sense where the unit to be secured is the state. In this sense, the security of the state stands for "national security". This is based on the notion that the state is the only legal and political entity that exercises sovereignty over a definite territory and population. In this approach national security is often understood as the capacity of a nation to mobilise military forces to guarantee its borders and to deter or successfully defend against physical threats, including military aggression and attacks by non-state actors, such as terror strikes.

The majority of states including Bangladesh configure their military forces mainly for territorial defence. Only some major powers like the US, Russia, and China and some middle-ranking powers like France and UK invest in higher-cost expeditionary capabilities, which allow their armed forces to project power and sustain military operations abroad.

Bangladeshi Identity and Underlying Hostility

The foreign policy of a country shapes its external behavioural pattern. While the foreign policy is related to a country's defence and security policy, at the same time foreign policy is often an extension of domestic policy. They are two sides of the same coin and the objectives of domestic policy are robustly pursued through foreign policy. The domestic politics of Bangladesh has shaped up in a particular way due to several factors, leaving an impact on its foreign policy towards India.

As discussed earlier, despite the help of India in the liberation war of Bangladesh, the deep state in Bangladesh views India as a possible threat to its security and sovereignty. This underlying hostility towards India has developed in a section of Bangladeshi population over a length of time. In fact, the process started even before India's independence from British rule and created a distinct identity for Bangladeshi Muslims, who believed that their interests were separate from Hindus and also from Muslims elsewhere in the sub-continent. A section in Bangladesh remained hostile towards India even during the liberation war. This section managed to dramatically change the politics of Bangladesh after the assassination of Sheikh Mujib. The assassination of Sheikh Mujib actually indicated an assertion of the deep state in the politics of Bangladesh. This deep state remains strong even today and has not allowed any meaningful cooperation between India and Bangladesh to take place in the realm of defence and security.

Bangladeshi Identity

The identity of the Bangladeshi people is made up of two parts – Bengali and the Muslim. The community consciousness of the

Bengali Muslims was first responsible for creation of Pakistan and subsequently Bangladesh. This makes it important to understand its formation. To a great extent, it also shaped the external behaviour of the Bangladeshi state in present times.

Community consciousness started developing among the Muslims during the British colonial period for several reasons. During this period, certain developments took place within the Hindu and Muslim communities. There was a social decline among Muslims because of the introduction of the Permanent Settlement of Bengal in 1793 and the use of English and Bengali in state employment. This united both elite Muslims and poor Muslims. The Faraizi movement which was the Bengali version of the Pan-Islamic Wahabi Movement, tried to popularise puritan Islam, which further strengthened this. Communal riots took place in Calcutta in the 1890s due to the rise of community consciousnesses among the Jute labourers of Calcutta, which also indicated the emergence of Muslims as a unified community who could be aroused using religion.

The development of community consciousness was also a result of policies followed by the colonial state. The partition of Bengal in 1905 added a territorial element to the community consciousness among Muslims in Bengal. It started a fruitful relationship with the British but made them hostile to Hindus. A series of political reforms initiated by the British with the Indian Councils Act of 1909, led to the devolution of power and legislative politics translated into political power for Muslims because of their numerical superiority.

The efforts of modernist leaders like Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, Nawab Abdul Latif and Sir Syed Amir Ali later emphasized the material aspects of competition with the Hindus. The Bengal Renaissance only strengthened the community consciousness of Muslims, as the symbols and heroes of the Renaissance were largely alien to Muslim tradition. These developments made Bengali Muslims believe that they were distinct from the Hindu community and their interests were different even from Muslims elsewhere in the country.

The Awami League because of its legacy of the liberation war gives greater emphasis to the Bengali part of the identity of Bangladeshi people, whereas the BNP gives greater importance to their Muslim identity.³ This instinct has also reflected in their relationship with India which has generally been better when the Awami League has been in power. Interestingly, the two major political parties have a different approach towards India, but there is a bipartisan political consensus on China.

Underlying Hostility Continued During and After the Liberation War

The underlying hostility towards India in a section of Bangladesh's population continued even during the liberation war. India's role was politicised during the war. A section in Bangladesh accused India of aiding groups close to the Awami League serving its political interests. Groups not allied to Awami League were viewed with suspicion by India whereas some in Bangladesh viewed India's closeness with the Bangladesh Government in Exile (BGE) in Kolkata with suspicion, and there were rumours of a secret pact with India. In fact, the anti-India rumour mills in Bangladesh get into overdrive whenever Sheikh Hasina is in India.

Bangladesh was divided between people who had participated in liberation war and those who didn't and remained confined to Dhaka. India's intentions were questioned by those who did not get Indian assistance during the liberation war and those who did not participate in the war. Induction of many pro-Pakistani elements into the government and the civil service to broaden the support base of the Awami League also influenced foreign policy against India. This further strengthened the deep state in Bangladesh. The hostile deep state found the two military aircraft donated by India as inferior. They also construed India's economic assistance as its desire to dominate the Bangladesh economy and interfere in domestic politics.

Initially, Bangladesh pursued India-friendly policies; it signed a twenty-five year Treaty of Peace and Friendship in 1972. It also decided to sort out border disputes as per the provisions of the Indira-

Mujib Accord. But soon differences began to show, though Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was still active. He tried to balance the relationship with India by cultivating good relations with other countries, especially those of the Islamic bloc and Mujib visited Lahore for the OIC summit. Bangladesh also tried to develop strong relations with the UN and the UN agencies, Britain and the Commonwealth, and efforts were also made to mend fences with China and the US. Mujib made friendly overtures to the Western world and also to the Islamic world, so that the situation could improve for Bangladesh, facing trouble in the aftermath of liberation.

There were several other reasons behind the strong anti-India sentiments in the immediate aftermath of liberation. There was an attempt by the Awami League to pursue one-party politics by setting up the Bangladesh Krishak Sramik Awami League (BaKSAL). This prompted the Left parties to protest against Indian influence. Indian policies like commissioning of the Farakka Barrage further strengthened such a sentiment. Trade relations between India and Bangladesh were another reason behind the acrimony. Bangladesh accused India of imposing various tariff and non-tariff barriers. In reality the main reason was Bangladesh's unreasonable expectation of economic help from India. The military in Bangladesh was strongly pro-US and pro-China. The Bangladesh army was made up of those who fought in liberation war as well as those who had been repatriated from Pakistan. Last but not the least, a large neighbour is often seen by many in the smaller country as a threat. This made many Bangladeshis wary of India.

Independent Bangladesh was based on the four pillars of nationalism, socialism, democracy, and secularism.⁴ However, the legacy of the liberation war was soon challenged with the assassination of Mujibur Rahman in a coup d'état on 15 August 1975.⁵ This led to a reversal in foreign policy that had been followed since liberation. The threat perception in Bangladesh dramatically changed and the powers that supported the liberation of the country – India and the Soviet Union – were perceived as threats. This change allowed anti-liberation forces to gain a foothold. There was a prolonged period of military rule from 1975 to 1990, which saw the coming to power

of General Zia-ur-Rahman, who was hostile to India. He founded a new political party, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). Though the BNP founder General Zia-ur-Rahman and his foreign policy adviser Shamsheer Choudhury presented themselves as leading freedom fighters, Zia's role of late, has come under scrutiny. India was critical of the military takeover but Pakistan welcomed it. Many members of Jatiyo Rakkhi Bahini, an elite para-military force, seen as the military arm of the Awami League, fled to India after Mujib's assassination engaged in guerrilla warfare against his regime from there.

General Zia rehabilitated the Islamists and allowed leaders of the Jamaat-e-Islami (JeI) to return to Bangladesh from Pakistan. The ban on their politics was also lifted. General Hussain Muhammad Ershad, who came to power after the assassination of General Zia, declared Islam as Bangladesh's state religion.

The restoration of democracy in 1990 did not alter this trend. The elections brought the BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami to power. This was also the period that saw the rise of Islamist extremism in the moderate Muslim country. The Jihadis, who were active in Afghanistan, began returning to their respective countries with the end of the war there and many of them came back to Bangladesh.

From 1990 the Jamaat has been participating actively in the democratic politics of Bangladesh which has allowed mobilization of people on the basis of religion. They hardly poll five to seven percent of the votes but often emerge as kingmakers. Despite the bloody history of the Jamaat in the liberation war, both the Awami League and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party are known to have worked closely with the Jamaat at different times to advance their respective political agendas.

The elections in 1996 brought the Sheikh Hasina-led Awami League to power. This gave some strength to the pro-liberation forces. Since the Awami League government could not gain full majority, it just about managed to check the downslide in bilateral relations.

The Jamaat was in power as part of the four-party alliance (2001-06). In spite of just 16 MPs, the Jamaat was holding sway

in the government. It had two ministries which it used to Islamise society. Though the Jamaat worked under a democratic framework, its objective was the establishment of an Islamic state, which runs contrary to the norms of a democratic state.

Islam has been used for different purposes by the military dictators and the Jamaat. Military rulers used Islam to legitimise their rule while the Jamaat used Islam to shun democracy and bring in its place Shariah-based Islamic rule. They hate other democracies, especially India. They brand India as Hindu state despite a significant Muslim population. Their politics is geared to oppose India, a supposedly Hindu state, which was reflected in the foreign policy of the four-party alliance.

It's not easy for any government in Bangladesh to follow India-friendly policies. A pro-India branding can ruin political careers in Bangladeshi politics. After Mujib's assassination in 1975, even Pakistan, against whom Bangladesh had fought a Liberation War, became a friendly country. This shift towards China and Pakistan has been explained sometimes by structural factors. It has been argued that since Bangladesh is surrounded on three sides by a large neighbour, India, it serves its interest to befriend China and Pakistan.

The anti-India chorus tends to grow louder when Sheikh Hasina is in power. When she came back to power in January 2009 a mutiny was instigated in the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) after she expressed a desire to prosecute war criminals. She showed her inclination to be friendly with India by prosecuting insurgents and terrorists. She took action against Islamist radicals and LeT, JeM, HuJI and JMB modules were busted. While India appreciated these actions, the anti-India rhetoric in Bangladesh showed no signs of abating. India's detractors argued that Bangladesh was giving up an important leverage against India by taking action against such elements.

Sheikh Hasina's proposal for constituting a counter-terror taskforce was criticised. The Jamaat construed it as an effort to allow the infiltration of Indian forces into Bangladesh. It even threatened that any such move would be resisted by Bangladeshis, whipping up passion against an imagined threat.

After her victory in the December 2008 general elections, Sheikh Hasina paid her first visit to India in January 2010, which was not an easy decision for her to take as there was a debate in Bangladesh whether she should first travel to China or India. It was feared that if she visited India first then India-baiters in Bangladesh would immediately condemn her as pro-India, an epithet hardly desired. When Hasina actually came to India her detractors accused of signing secret deals with India.

India's detractors in Bangladesh see problems in everything India does. China's Infrastructural projects are applauded but Indian projects like the Rampal coal-fired power station project, being constructed at Rampal Upazila of Bagerhat District in Khulna, Bangladesh, are opposed on environmental grounds despite a severe power shortage in the country. Many in Bangladesh are not happy with India supplying electricity; they argue that Bangladesh should not be dependent on electricity from India.

The opposition in Bangladesh hardly recognised India's grant of economic concessions. The power supply to Bangladesh was ignored and actually seen negatively though India itself remains a power deficit country. Other goodwill measures like border haats and instruction to the BSF not to use lethal weapons against Bangladeshi infiltrators were also ignored.

Though the coming to power of Sheikh Hasina in January 2009 has arrested the decline in the India-Bangladesh bilateral relationship, the Islamists still remain very strong and are getting stronger. It was hoped that the successful trial and punishment of war criminals would be a jolt to the anti-liberation forces that had become stronger in the polity after their rehabilitation during military regimes. It was also expected that the deligitimisation of anti-Liberation forces that are also vociferously anti-India, could alter domestic politics in Bangladesh. Then it might be easier for India to get acceptability of both the major political parties and India-Bangladesh relations might be insulated from the 'confrontational domestic politics'. Unfortunately, that has not happened. If anything, Islamist forces have only become stronger. The situation is such that even the Awami League has to maintain a relationship with these forces to

remain relevant in the politics of Bangladesh. It is often argued that the present upturn in the India-Bangladesh political relationship is because of the Awami League and particularly due to Sheikh Hasina being at the helm of affairs. Things might dramatically change with a change in the political regime.

Geo-Political Setting of the South Asian Region

The geo-political setting of South Asia is unique which influences the political and security dynamics of the region.

The two major countries of the Indian sub-continent, India and Pakistan, were created after the British left in 1947. East Pakistan subsequently separated from Pakistan and is now known as Bangladesh. This history has left several legacy issues and a political baggage that influences the bilateral relationship between the countries. A long-standing rivalry exists between India and Pakistan; both countries have fought three wars purportedly over Kashmir. Pakistan presents Kashmir as a legacy issue of the partition and lays claim over it. Two of these wars were fought when Bangladesh was part of Pakistan.

Though there have been no wars between India and Bangladesh, their border does see sporadic hostilities. India shares a 4,095 km long border with Bangladesh that is porous, riverine, and difficult to manage. Presently, border guarding forces of the two countries share a friendly relationship, but in the past, some unfortunate incidents have taken place. The border witnesses large movement of the population – some legal but some of it also illegal. A flourishing illegal trade in cattle takes place on the border. All of this sometimes results in unfortunate border incidents. The Government of India has asked its border guarding forces to use non-lethal weapons to check the illegal movement of the population. Still, sometimes they use force to protect themselves from criminals and smugglers. Things have somewhat improved with the resolution of border disputes and exchange of enclaves between India and Bangladesh, but the occasional border incidents do spoil the relationship.

The countries of South Asia are asymmetrical in size. India is bigger than all other countries of the region put together. Moreover,

India is the only country that shares a geographical border with all other countries of South Asia and is at its centre. This enhances India's geopolitical significance. The smaller countries of the region often grudge this huge asymmetry in size with India and try various means to balance their larger neighbour.

India shares its longest border of 4,095 km with Bangladesh. Indian states surround Bangladesh from three sides. Thus, barring a small border that Bangladesh shares with Myanmar, the country is almost India-locked. India also shares its border with China, a major global power. But they have an uneasy bilateral relationship because of their contested borders. China does not share a border with Bangladesh but is only separated by a few kilometres of Indian territory. This has made Bangladesh look to China for its security needs. Perhaps some of the Bangladeshi policymakers think that China can come to their help in the event of a military crisis.

The security dynamics of South Asia is somewhat complex as India assesses its security position in the light of China's strength, while Pakistan does so in comparison to India. This brings an outside power, China into the security game of South Asia and often smaller countries of this region have tried to play the China card to counter-balance India. China has happily accepted this role as it makes the neighbourhood further difficult for India.

While ASEAN and the European Union are bound together by their shared security perception, this shared security perception is missing in South Asia. To make matters worse, the South Asian nations often see security threats emanating from the region itself.

To create confidence among the smaller neighbours in South Asia, India has tried to deal with them bilaterally on various disputes. But this preference for bilateral dispute resolution has not been appreciated at times by Bangladesh. It seems to feel empowered when seeking multi-lateral institutions or trying to use extra-regional powers as mediators.

Foreign Policy Aspirations of Bangladesh

The foreign policy of Bangladesh is determined by its geographical location, historical traditions, natural resources, economic and

social needs, ideological beliefs, religious and/or nationalistic values, and elite-behaviour and perceptions. These factors don't play their role in any specific order; rather it depends on who is holding power in Bangladesh then.

Though there are no well-defined foreign policy goals of Bangladesh, since its liberation from Pakistan in 1971 Bangladesh has two major foreign policy aspirations– search for security to preserve sovereignty and search for resources so that the country can develop and economic welfare of its people can be ensured.⁶ Besides, as mentioned earlier, Bangladesh is geographically 'India-locked'. In this situation, Bangladesh tries to live in harmony but maintains a distinct identity from the Indian communities living around them, thereby trying to define its separate Bangladeshi identity.

The two major foreign policy aspirations and its India-locked geography have guided Dhaka's external behaviour. To break the structural constraint of geography and to meet the twin foreign policy aspirations, Dhaka has sought a high level of international interactions. It was felt that the interests of Bangladesh would be better served if it enmeshes itself in a web of extra-regional linkages. This would enhance global stakes in the country and thereby reduce the power-gap with the main regional power, India. Though Bangladesh has never faced any real security threat from India, these linkages were seen as a means to buttress Bangladesh's sense of security vis-à-vis its larger neighbour and also support her developmental aspirations. The quest for resources necessitated aid, trade, remittances from her expatriates, and foreign investments.

India Containment Strategy of Bangladesh

As a weaker neighbour, Bangladesh has three options. It can develop a close relationship with India and avoid any conflict. The second option for it is to retain a strong military capability and make it as difficult as possible for the potential adversary to overcome. Finally, it can also opt out of the international system altogether following Myanmar's (Burma) example. Bangladesh has chosen a foreign policy which is close to the second option with greater emphasis on

political and military deterrence by creating an array of international linkages that would heighten global stakes and interests, and reduce the power-gap with her larger neighbour.⁷ It has tried to achieve this objective in the following ways.

The Policy of Delicate Balance

Bangladesh has opted for a policy of delicate balance between China and India. India and Bangladesh share their longest border. This geography makes it necessary for Bangladesh to go for an India-centric foreign policy. However, China is also not very far from the Bangladesh border. Bangladesh also wants to benefit from China which has emerged as a major economic and military power. At the same time, it does not want to create any misgivings by tilting towards any one power. To meet this challenge, Bangladesh has tried to strike a delicate balance in its relationship with India and China. Though the West is the largest export destination for Bangladesh, China meets its large import requirements and security needs.

Bangladesh not Opposed to Militarisation of the Indian Ocean

Bangladesh has also changed its policy with regard to the Indian Ocean. Bangladesh faces the Indian Ocean through the Bay of Bengal. In the first few years after liberation, Bangladesh like India wanted the Indian Ocean to be a zone of peace. However, the change of government in 1975 resulted in the reversal of this policy. Bangladesh is now not comfortable with India's growing naval power. It thinks that the presence of other navies including extra-regional ones will act as a restraint on Indian navy. Bangladesh thinks that a strong Indian navy can pose a threat to its trade and commerce through the Bay of Bengal. The concern to protect trade and commerce has changed the role of navies of coastal countries. The navies are no longer confined to just the defence of territories. The navies now patrol distant waters to keep the sea lanes safe and promote trade. Bangladesh now wants to play a role in the security of the Indian Ocean.

Importance to UN and Multilateralism

The United Nations provides a platform for smaller countries to play a part in world politics disproportionate to their economic and military strengths. Bangladesh sees the UN as a significant player in her external relations. The UN is not only seen as an insurer of its security and sovereignty but also as a forum to relate to other countries. The interaction with the UN has also allowed Bangladesh to contribute a large number of soldiers to peacekeeping operations. It keeps her armed forces – an important element in her policymaking – engaged, contented, and well-resourced. It also helps to keep the world order in line with the interests of weaker states.

Bangladesh's policymakers are of the view that they stand to gain most by providing satisfaction to the international community, especially its key players. This makes the country avoid flashy external behaviour. Bangladesh emphasizes multilateralism.

Bangladesh's international interactions are based on twelve pillars. It has majorly interacted with four categories of states, four multilateral political organisations and four trade and financial institutions. Among the four categories of states the first category is of major development partners (aid donors), where the United States (US), the European Union (EU), and Japan figure prominently. Regional countries like India and Pakistan figure in the second category. Middle Eastern Muslim states like Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) come next. Finally, there is China, which is seen by many as all-important and an "all-weather friend".

Bangladesh is also part of four multilateral political organisations – the United Nations (UN) System, the Commonwealth of Nations, the Organisation of Islamic Conference, and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). Besides, Bangladesh is also linked to four trade and financial institutions – the World Trade Organisation (WTO), the Bretton Woods Institutions, the Asian Development Bank, and the Islamic Development Bank. These twelve pillars sustain the country's foreign policy system.

Bangladesh believes that its interests are usually better served by acting as a member of wider international groupings like the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), the Organisation of Islamic Conference

(OIC), or the Least Developed Countries (LDCs), rather than individually. This approach does not annoy any major state actor and is seen as some kind of international “trade union activity”. This also makes the country appear to be acting from “high moral ground”. Bangladesh follows the international “club rules” by supporting disarmament and non-proliferation, and counter-terrorism.

Economic Growth: Unshackles Foreign and Defence Policy

Bangladesh was a war-ravaged economy in 1971 after the liberation war. The situation was so bad that Henry Kissinger described it as a basket case. This made Bangladesh heavily dependent on aid in the initial decades. This dependence affected her manoeuvrability in policy-making. This also affected its defence and security policy. The donors generally apply conditions and want their money to be spent in a particular way. However, the dependence of Dhaka on foreign aid has now been significantly reduced with considerable economic development in the last decade.

The nature of Bangladeshi external trade has changed recently. Massive growth in Bangladeshi exports has considerably narrowed its trade deficit. In FY2012-13 the country saw a record positive balance of payment of over US\$ 5 billion. This new dynamics of external trade has created new vested interests leaving its impact on India-Bangladesh relations

Businessmen are now dominating Bangladesh’s parliament. According to Transparency International, business is the principal profession for the majority (59 per cent) of the MPs. This means businessmen are able to dominate the decision-making in parliament. As the interests of Bangladeshi businessmen dovetail with countries like China, they try to influence foreign policy in China’s favour. China has emerged as the largest trading partner of Bangladesh, replacing India and there is massive growth in Chinese exports to Bangladesh. But in comparison, Bangladesh is not able to export much to China. This has given rise to a big import community in Bangladesh who thrive on importing goods from China.

The section friendly to China in Bangladesh does not see much problem in having a larger trade deficit, but even a smaller trade

deficit with India is strongly resented. India is often accused of putting tariff and non-tariff barriers on Bangladesh. All this is used to create a hostile environment against India leading to deterioration of bilateral relationship. The businessmen are pro-China with the objective of making money. Many of them are associated with the ruling party Awami League for the same objective.

Role of Army in the Polity of Bangladesh

There is no constitutional role for the army in the polity of Bangladesh but it still plays a very crucial role in the domestic politics of the country. From 1975-90 army generals, Zia-ur-Rahman and H.M. Ershad were in power. It is believed that the army played an important role in the second caretaker government headed by Fakhruddin Ahmed. Similarly, the Jamaat penetrated top ranks of the armed forces during the rule of the BNP-headed four-party alliance.

Since liberation of Bangladesh army has close allegiance to Pakistan and China. Initially, the Bangladesh army shared a common legacy with the Pakistan army. Bangladeshi Generals had served in the Pakistan army and they shared personal rapport with Pakistani officers. The nature of the Bangladeshi army substantially changed when it absorbed 28,000 repatriated Bengali soldiers from Pakistan. After Pakistan recognised Bangladesh, this relationship was easier to develop and consolidate.

Subsequently, China also recognised Bangladesh and Bangladeshi leaders started tilting towards China. China took the responsibility of rebuilding the Bangladeshi army. It provided training and became the main supplier of equipment to it. Arms were sold not so much for economic but a strategic objective. Over the years, China has supplied tanks, aircraft and submarines and is closely involved in the country's missile programme.

China shares a close relationship with both the armed forces of Bangladesh and Pakistan. This makes for an interesting configuration. This has created difficulties for the Indian army to develop close relations with the Bangladesh army. Even under the Awami League government when some Indian army officers went to Bangladesh

to take their National Defence Courses (NDC) ISI made attempt to trap them showing the deeply entrenched nature of Pakistan army. In the past, the Directorate General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI) and the ISI had worked in close cooperation to create disturbances and insurgency in India.

Things are gradually changing as the tolerance level of Awami League government towards such activity has waned. Many DGFI officers and NSI officers who were engaged in encouraging arms smuggling were tried for their role. Now the Bangladesh army has reached a stage where most of the Generals of the Pakistan era have retired. Generals who are now assuming reins of power have no organic link with the Pakistan army, which is also showing in their attitude. Now it could be relatively easy for India to develop friendly relations between the two armed forces.

The Western countries enjoy some influence over the Bangladesh armed forces as Bangladesh is one of the biggest contributors to the UN peacekeeping operations. Participation in the UN peacekeeping operations is financially beneficial for the Bangladesh military besides bringing other advantages. UN peacekeeping in a way has got linked with the corporate interest of the Bangladesh armed forces. This sometimes acts as a constraint on the army, which has avoided direct takeover of power after 1990.

Military Policy: Formulated and Executed by the Armed Forces Division

The Bangladesh Armed Forces (Bānglādēśa saśastra bāhinī) consists of the three uniformed military services of Bangladesh – the Bangladesh Army, the Bangladesh Navy, and the Bangladesh Air Force. Armed forces fall under the jurisdiction of the Defence Ministry. The Border Guard Bangladesh (formerly Bangladesh Rifles) and Bangladesh Coast Guard are under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Home Affairs during peacetime, but during wartime, they fall under the command of the Bangladesh Army and the Bangladesh Navy respectively.

The President of Bangladesh is the Commander-in-Chief of the military. The Armed Forces Division (AFD) is the principal

administrative organization that formulates and executes military policy. The Ministry of Defence (MoD) does not exercise any operational or policy authority over the Armed Forces. Currently, both the AFD and the MoD are headed by the Prime Minister of Bangladesh.

A six-member advisory board advises both the president and the prime minister to coordinate military policy with foreign and intelligence policy. It consists of the three military services' Chiefs of Staff, the Principal Staff Officer of the Armed Forces Division, and military secretaries to the president and the prime minister. The directors-general of the NSI, the DGFI, and the BGB also serve in an advisory capacity, when invited.

Expansion and Modernisation of Bangladesh Military under Forces Goal 2030

As military still remains an important player in the polity of Bangladesh, to please the military, the Sheikh Hasina government had started a long-term modernisation programme called Forces Goal 2030 in the year 2009.⁸ The primary focus of this modernisation programme is to reform the military organisation and training, expand the size of the forces, acquire modern weapons, and develop indigenous defence industries. This was the first modernisation programme of the Bangladesh Armed Forces and was revised in 2017.⁹ It is also supposed to be “in accordance with the Defense Policy of 1974 adopted by Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.”¹⁰

Under this programme, large-scale expansion is taking place in the Bangladesh Army, Navy, and Air Force. The Bangladesh military is now preparing to create a force that would be capable of conducting multi-platform warfare. The Bangladesh Army has already procured a variety of upgraded equipment like helicopters, unmanned aircraft, and anti-aircraft missiles. A significant part of it has been sourced from China.¹¹

The Forces Goal 2030 plans to make the Bangladesh Air Force a technologically advanced, well-trained, and well-equipped force that can deter any threat to Bangladeshi airspace. These plans emphasize

strengthening both air power and air defence capabilities.¹² To make the Air Force perform its duties and responsibilities more efficiently, it is being divided into two separate commands – Southern Air Command and Northern Air Command. Two new air bases are also being built. A new air base and a maritime air support operation centre (MASOC) are being set up under the Southern Air Command at Barisal, to ensure maritime security. Another air base is under construction at Sylhet.¹³ Bangladesh already has two other air bases – one at Cox’s Bazar, and the Bangabandhu airbase at Dhaka. There are also plans to modernize and expand the Cox’s Bazar air base. The Bangladesh Air Force has purchased its fighter and training aircraft from China, Russia and the United Kingdom (UK).¹⁴

The Bangladesh Navy achieved its aim of becoming a three-dimensional force when it acquired two Ming-class type 035B submarines from China. It wants to increase its submarine inventory to eight. The Navy has already started an aviation wing and operates many helicopters and planes.

Bangladesh is also creating new military stations. A new cantonment has been built in Ramu near the Myanmar border. It is also constructing a new naval base that would be the largest in Bangladesh and have berthing for submarines. A new submarine base is being constructed in Kutubdia. New air bases are also planned.

Bangladesh is increasing its defence production capacity. The capacity of its only ordnance factory is being increased to manufacture more automatic guns and ammunition. The Khulna Shipyard has started building patrol crafts. It is also overhauling its fighters and helicopters in its aeronautical centre.

Massive Increase in Defence Budget

The ambitious effort to modernise and expand the Bangladesh military under the Forces Goal 2030 programme requires huge resources. Therefore it is not surprising that the Bangladesh’s Defence budget has been continuously increasing. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), Bangladesh had the second-largest relative increase in military spending between 2008 and 2017. The largest relative increases in military spending during

the period were made by Cambodia (332 per cent), Bangladesh (123 per cent), Indonesia (122 per cent), and China (110 per cent).¹⁵

The defence budget of Bangladesh comprises two major parts. The “non-development expenditure” includes military salaries and costs for maintenance and operations. The “development expenditure” is used for military acquisitions. For the FY2018-19, the defence budget was of BTB 290.66 billion (US\$ 3.45 billion). It was 6.2 per cent of the total annual government expenditure and about 1.3 per cent of the GDP.¹⁶ The military budget allocated BTB 279.1 billion for “non-development expenditure” and BTB 11.52 billion for “development expenditure”, including military acquisitions. These allocations represented increases over the FY2017-18 of 9.6 per cent and 24 per cent respectively. However, despite these budgetary increases, the extent of the acquisition was such that it led to a shortfall in funds. To address this, Bangladesh has in recent years relied on financial assistance from its two largest military suppliers, China and Russia.¹⁷

No Proper Framework for Civil-Military Relations

Bangladesh has so far failed to evolve any proper framework for civil-military relations. The defence and military issues are still considered the domain of the military. The political leadership of Bangladesh remains cautious given the history of military coups in the country. Though India has never posed any security threat to Bangladesh which has actually allowed Bangladesh to send large contingents to UN peacekeeping operations helping its military to gain exposure and acquisition, the deep state of Bangladesh, largely made of the army, intelligence and bureaucracy, still harbours hostility towards India. The forces hostile to Sheikh Hasina and India are kept in check as Bangladesh is presently doing economically well. They might assert themselves if they perceive any major change in the country’s foreign or security policy.

Methodology of this Study

This research work has extensively used primary as well as secondary sources. It has used material collected over the last two decades.

Media reports from Bangladesh have been given precedence though the research has also extensively used international publications like *Jane's Defense Weekly*. Though no specific field visit was undertaken for this research, attempt has been made to capitalize on large number of previous visits to Bangladesh in the course of last two decades.

Organisation of this Study

Apart from this introductory chapter (Chapter 1), this book comprises six more chapters. Chapter 2 discusses the military and security relationship between India and Bangladesh. Chapter 3 discusses Bangladesh's defence partnership with China. The revival of Bangladesh's defence partnership with Russia is the subject of discussion in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 discusses the defence relationship between the United States and Bangladesh. Chapter 6 discusses the role of Bangladesh in UN peacekeeping operations. The book concludes with an assessment of why the defence partnership between India and Bangladesh has not developed despite the recent political bonhomie between the two countries.

Notes

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2. Bangladesh's Hobbled Defence Partnership with India

In the immediate aftermath of the liberation of Bangladesh, the bilateral relationship between India and Bangladesh was euphoric. India had militarily intervened in the sub-continental crisis of 1971 and helped Bangladesh emerge as a new sovereign nation. However, this bonhomie between the two nations was soon tested when Bangladesh started its journey under Sheikh Mujibur Rahman as a neighbour, sharing a border with India. The political upheavals that took place in Bangladesh after the assassination of Mujib dramatically changed the dynamics of the India-Bangladesh relationship. The new rulers of Bangladesh were ideologically very different from the pro-liberation forces and were feeling threatened by the powers that supported its liberation rather than from those that opposed it. So far there has never been a threat of military aggression from India, still Bangladesh wants to prepare for the day in case India ever became its adversary.¹ The foreign and defence policy of the country has been geared to reduce the power-gap with its larger neighbour, India. Bangladesh wants to acquire effective defence capabilities from sources other than India, mainly due to its perceived sense of insecurity. With this backdrop, it is not surprising that no major military and defence cooperation has taken place between the two countries. Any attempt to promote military cooperation between the two countries has been resisted by the defence establishment of the country and the political leadership has chosen to follow their advice.

Evolution of a Checkered Relationship

There have been many ups and downs in the India-Bangladesh bilateral relationship. At the time of the liberation of Bangladesh, India was seen as a benefactor but only a few years down the line the dictators and military rulers of Bangladesh viewed India as an adversary. Even during the best of times, a section in Bangladesh always remains hostile to India. This hostility also pervades the security establishment of Bangladesh in a major way. This has not allowed the bilateral relationship to achieve its full potential despite the absence of any major issue between the two countries.

Irritants on the Eve of Liberation

The political agitation for autonomy in East Pakistan had evoked a circumspect policy reaction from Indira Gandhi. Initially, she preferred a political settlement but Yahya Khan's version of the political settlement in August 1971 meant that there was no scope for the return of Hindu refugees. This forced her to go for the military option. The policies followed by India during the unfolding crisis in East Pakistan left a significant impact on the Bangladeshi leadership of that time. It also became important for future Indo-Bangladesh relations.

On the eve of the liberation war, all the exiled Bangladeshi leaders were given shelter in India for which they were grateful but not all of them were friendly to India. Some, like Khandaker Mushtaq Ahmad, were known to be close to the US. The Provisional government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, popularly known as the Mujibnagar government, was established following the declaration of independence of East Pakistan on 10 April 1971. Mushtaq was the foreign minister in the Provisional government. The exercise of international relations for Bangladesh started when its Provisional government began interacting with the Government of India. This relationship also determined the initial international alignments of the new state. Most of the Awami League leaders however, were sympathetic to India and were also anxious to get formal Indian recognition, which came on 6 December 1971.

A Bangladesh foreign office was set up in Calcutta but the Pakistan-era bureaucracy remained sceptical of India. Its bureaucrats made a very different assessment of the situation. A position paper prepared by them assessed that India's support was basically because of her negative approach towards Pakistan. It argued that India desires to weaken both East and West Pakistan for political, historical, and economic reasons and has a deep political motive behind its support. Another document after liberation suggested that though Bangladesh will have to resign itself for an initial period of Indian influence, it must try to minimise it as much as possible. These bureaucrats subsequently played a key role in shaping Bangladeshi policies.

Sections of Bangladesh Armed Forces and Mukti Bahini were unhappy with the overall Indian strategy. There was also widespread resentment among Bangladeshi freedom fighters, who felt that the Indian Army had intervened during the last phase and taken away the credit that was due to them. Surrender was technically to the Allied Command but the Army Chief, M.A.G. Osmany, was absent during the surrender ceremony on 16 December 1971. The pro-Chinese Left in East Pakistan was opposed to Indian involvement from the beginning.

This meant that Bangladesh was initially having an India-friendly government but there were enough people who were looking for an opportunity to take Bangladesh away from India in case of any change of government in Dhaka.

Initial Relationship Euphoric but not Trouble-free

In the immediate aftermath of the liberation, the India-Bangladesh relationship was euphoric. It was quite clear that India would help the future government of Bangladesh. Both countries pooled their administrative resources to disarm and reorganise the guerillas. India was the first country to host Bangladesh Foreign Minister Abdus Samad Azad. Though Mujib declined the offer of an Indian airliner to fly him to Dhaka from Pakistan, he described people of India as the best friends of his country and Indira Gandhi as the leader of mankind.

Mujib during his first official visit to India in February 1972 saw the friendship between India and Bangladesh as everlasting. When Indira Gandhi visited Dhaka in March 1972 she received a tumultuous reception. A joint declaration was signed which decided about trials of Pakistani prisoners of war. It also decided to establish a Joint Rivers Commission and approved principles of Border and Transit Trade. During this visit, the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Peace was also signed.

Treaty of Peace and Friendship: Disliked by the anti-India Section in Bangladesh

The Treaty of Peace and Friendship was not liked by the detractors of the India-Bangladesh relationship. China was also not happy with it.² By this Treaty, both countries agreed not to enter into any military alliance directed against the other and not to allow their territory to threaten each other's security. They were to hold mutual consultations if either party was attacked or was threatened with attack.³ The Treaty allowed cooperation with other states in the struggle against colonialism, racism, and for national liberation. It formalised relations between India and Bangladesh. Some people in Bangladesh felt that the Treaty drew the new state close to the Indo-Soviet Orbit. The Treaty also underlined Bangladesh's sovereign status.

The detractors of the India-Bangladesh relationship viewed the Treaty in a negative light. It was pointed out that the Treaty would make Bangladesh dependent on India for economic and defence purposes for several years to come. They felt that this situation would only change with a radical change in the politics of Bangladesh. This is exactly what happened after the killing of Mujib when the Treaty was suspended.

The section hostile to India especially did not like Article 9 of the Treaty. This Article stipulated that

Each of the High Contracting Parties shall refrain from giving any assistance to any third party taking part in an armed conflict, against the other party. In case either party is attacked or threatened with attack, the high contracting parties shall immediately enter

into mutual consultations in order to take appropriate effective measures to eliminate the threat and thus ensure the peace and security of their counties.⁴

This section feared that in the event of a war between India and China, India might ask for the right of passage through Bangladeshi territory. They disliked this situation as they thought they have earned the friendship of China post-August 1975. They thought it would not be in the country's national interest to help India against China.

Though the Treaty was a comprehensive and wide-ranging document, covering economic, security and military issues, yet it was mostly considered a security and military pact, since the important provisions covered these areas.⁵

The Treaty was signed in the backdrop of a crisis. Immediately after Liberation, Bangladesh was facing political isolation. There was a challenge to rebuild the new nation that had emerged after a bloody war. In this situation, India was one of the few countries Mujib could have looked to for help. He wanted most of the Indian army to go back, leaving behind a small section to help him to manage the new nation. The presence of the Indian army was stopping countries like the United States and China from offering help. The Treaty marked a formal closure of the activities of the Indian Army in Bangladesh. It provided legal protection to the Indian soldiers who remained in post-war Bangladesh. The Bangladesh army, still in its infancy, was in no position to deal with any external threat, compelling them to rely on India's friendship.

The Treaty was meant to cement the India-Bangladesh relationship but a section in Bangladesh looked at it with suspicion. The Bangladeshi defence forces also felt that the Treaty undermined their importance.

The dynamics of India-Bangladesh dramatically changed with the assassination of Mujib in 1975. The subsequent military regimes showed little interest in the Treaty and it was put on the back burner, under virtual suspension. The Treaty lapsed in 1997 after completing its stipulated 25 years. At that time, despite the India-friendly Awami League government being in power, no attempt was made to renew the Treaty. India did not pursue the matter either.

Trade and Economy Create Difficulties for Bilateral Relations

The difficulties in the bilateral relations began with trade and the economy. Both sides entered into economic contracts that later proved difficult to sustain. The Government of India wanted to trade at a state-to-state level. But it was difficult to do away with private trading altogether, given the sprawling border. The problem also arose with trade in jute, fish, and coal. The Bangladeshis alleged that the Indian State Corporations took a long time to organise trade and charged higher prices. Even the Awami League ministers began criticising Indian authorities which was quite unusual. Soon, there was a growing decline in bilateral trade, causing bitterness.

The anti-India section in Bangladesh viewed India's economic help as a form of dependence. India, despite being a developing country, was the largest donor to Bangladesh in 1972. Its contribution was US\$ 275 million whereas the US contribution was US\$ 214 million. When Planning Minister D. P. Dhar visited Dhaka, he announced another short-term credit of US\$ 60 million. The procurements were tied to India. Dhar also announced the setting up of a fertiliser and cement factory. The critics said that if the production was aimed at the Indian market then it would create a structural link which would be difficult to break in case of need. They also argued that Bangladesh would be left with a huge surplus if India developed capacity in these products. Clearly, there were people in Bangladesh who wanted no economic cooperation with India, despite their country facing huge economic difficulty. This was their approach when the World Bank had to create the "Bangladesh Aid Group" in October 1974, with 26 participating governments and institutions, with a commitment of US\$ 551 million in FY1974 and US\$ 1.2 billion the following year, to meet the aid requirements of the war-ravaged country.

The dissatisfaction with economic relations also affected the political relations between the two countries. However, the foreign office of Bangladesh was not immediately influenced by the view of the economic bureaucracy because at that time, India was the conduit through which Bangladesh was linked to the international system. Bangladeshi diplomats were using the facility provided by

the Indian missions in various parts of the world. The main goal of Dhaka's foreign office at that juncture was to ensure the sovereign status of Bangladesh.

Interests Start to Diverge

Soon, certain developments took place that showed that the interests of India and Bangladesh did not always converge. The Indian media also commented that establishing a stable long-term relationship with Bangladesh was proving to be far more delicate and complex affair than most Indians expected.

The divergence in interests was first visualised as early as June 1972 when India and Pakistan engaged in talks at Shimla. India now wanted to improve its relationship with Pakistan. Moreover, the 90,000 PoWs were a financial strain and political embarrassment to India. Bangladesh on the other hand, wanted total disengagement with Pakistan and the PoWs were an important bargaining chip in that effort. It also wanted to try 1,500 of them with criminal records. India sent P.N. Haksar to Bangladesh to dispel the notion that it would reach an agreement with Pakistan at the expense of Bangladesh.

Another interesting development was Abdus Samad Azad who was sympathetic to India, being replaced as Foreign Minister by Dr. Kamal Hossain. Tajuddin Ahmed known for his pro-India leanings, was also relieved of the Planning portfolio taken by Mujib. These cabinet changes reflected a shift towards the nationalist approach vis-à-vis India.

The differences were further widened by Bangladesh's diplomacy of recognition. In the immediate aftermath of the Liberation, Bangladesh had to embark on diplomacy of recognition. It also had to bring back the Bangladeshis stranded in Pakistan. In its Liberation struggle, a number of countries like the United States, China, and some Arab countries were aligned with Pakistan. These countries were reluctant to recognise Bangladesh immediately. The first challenge of the foreign policy of Bangladesh was to make these countries change their position and recognise Bangladesh. The prevailing Cold War also complicated things for Bangladesh. A large part of its economy was tied to the United States, which saw Bangladesh being desperate

to reconcile its relationship with the latter. Though the country was helped by the Soviet Union and the East European countries during its Liberation struggle, the economic relationship was not of any great significance. Some trading relationships existed with China but the business elite, the bureaucracy, and even the intellectual class, all were familiar with the West. This situation made Bangladesh try hard to get recognition from the US and the pro-US Arab countries, supporting Pakistan.

The opportunity came in 1974 when Pakistan was hosting the summit meeting of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) at Lahore in February that year. It was difficult for the OIC not to invite Bangladesh which was the second most populous Muslim country. Several key leaders of the OIC came to Dhaka to impress upon Mujib to join the conference. Mujib gladly accepted the invitation and got the recognition of Pakistan and other Arab countries. Some Bangladeshi writers believe that India did not take this development in good spirit and the relationship began to falter thereafter. It is pointed out that this was seen on the issue of enclaves, where, in May 1974, India had agreed to exchange enclaves but later backtracked. It is also suggested that perhaps India held back because of the fear of losing 10,000 acres of land, but this did not go down well with Mujib, who lost interest in developing further relations with India.⁶

Easing Tension with Pakistan Brings Focus on India-Bangladesh Bilateral Issues

The situation in the Indian sub-continent started easing in February 1974 after Pakistan recognised Bangladesh. Bangladesh also dropped its insistence to try 1,500 PoWs. Ironically, the easing of tension between Bangladesh and Pakistan brought to the fore bilateral issues between India and Bangladesh. Now, issues like Farakka Barrage, the demarcation of the maritime boundary, the nuclear tests, and the annexation of Sikkim were given attention.

The Farakka Barrage was constructed to resuscitate the port of Calcutta by flushing out the deposits of silt. Bangladesh claimed that India was drawing extra water from the river Ganges which was adversely affecting the country. Mujib raised this issue with Indira

Gandhi in May 1974. The project was completed in 1975. When the Farakka project was inaugurated on 21 May 1975, Mujib's Water Resources minister who was expected to attend the ceremony, cancelled his visit. Farakka, despite subsequent agreement, has remained a sore point.

The issue of the demarcation of the maritime boundary gained importance in 1974 when a conflict arose with India after the Government of Bangladesh signed production-sharing contracts with six foreign oil companies, granting them extraction rights. The area was believed to contain undersea oil reserves. However, the importance of this issue later declined, as the exploration yielded little success. Presently, this issue appears to have been sorted out after the UNCLOS' judgement.

India's nuclear test in 1974 had some adverse impact on the India-Bangladesh relationship. There were hostile reactions in unofficial circles and the government did not try to distance itself from it. The opposition tried to whip up anti-India sentiments in Bangladesh and attributed aggressiveness to Indian policies. Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani also known as Maulana Bhashani leader of the National Awami Party (NAP) viewed the nuclear test as a veiled threat to Bangladesh. Some others considered this test as inconsistent with India's image. Interestingly, however, Bangladesh itself was negotiating the transfer of nuclear technology with India. In April 1974, an agreement was signed for the peaceful use of atomic energy. Under this agreement, a research reactor was set up at Roopur in Pabna district. Protests in Bangladesh were organised with the objective to stop any major accretion of power to India which could be a source of worry for Bangladesh in case India ever became an adversary.

The merger of Sikkim with India was critically viewed by the Bangladesh media. Protest demonstrations were organised at Dhaka University. This merger was seen as a mark of India's expansionist policy and a threat to Dhaka. The Bangladesh government tried to allay domestic concerns by saying that it was larger than Sikkim and a member of the United Nations. The statement also indicated that Dhaka was counting on external safeguards in case of a potential Indian threat.

Crisis in Bilateral Relationship after Mujib's Killing: Benefactor India seen as Adversary

The real crisis in the bilateral relationship came when Mujib was killed in a coup in Dhaka on 15 August 1975. After that, there were rapid changes of government in Bangladesh between August and November 1975. Dhaka accused India of harbouring dissidents and continued withdrawal of waters at Farakka.

After Mujib, Khandakar Mushtaq Ahmed came to power.⁷ Though he was a member of the Awami League, he was not friendly to India. This caused concern to New Delhi. Pakistan was the first country to recognise his government and called it the Islamic Republic. Bangladesh was now seen leaning towards Pakistan and towards the Islamic nations and towards China at the global level. These developments made India circumspect. Though a working relationship was established between the two countries, the quality of the relationship was drastically different from what it had been since early 1972.

In early November 1975, a series of complicated developments took place in Bangladesh, and after the abortive putsch by Brigadier Khaled Mosharraf on 7 November 1975, Major General Ziaur Rahman emerged as the strongman. However, Mujib's supporters continued their struggle and there were skirmishes in the border areas. In April 1976, Dhaka alleged that Indians were training and arming some Bengali civil and military dissidents. Bangladesh also tried to raise this issue at the UN in New York.

On Farakka, Dhaka alleged that India continued to withdraw water even beyond the period specified in the interim agreement of May 1975. In Bangladesh, Maulana Bhsani initiated a public agitation against India. India was concerned about Dhaka's failure to stop inflammatory propaganda against it. Dhaka also tried to internationalise the issue at the 42-nation Islamic Foreign Minister's Conference at Istanbul in May 1976 and also at the UN. India advised Bangladesh to sort out the issue bilaterally. Bangladesh later returned to bilateralism after failing to get any effective international assistance.

The bilateral relationship was also impacted by the economic relationship. Bangladesh had some unreasonable expectations from

India. In January 1976, an agreement was signed on coal trade. But Bangladesh displayed an adamant approach. Its Commerce Secretary Nurul Islam wanted India to assist Bangladesh as it had substantial natural resources and a large industrial base. He accused India of shirking responsibility that naturally devolved on her as the senior trading partner.

Political Change in India (1977) and Regional Détente

The August 1975 political crisis had also affected the India-Bangladesh bilateral relationship. However, the situation started improving with a change of government in New Delhi in March 1977. The initiative was taken by Dhaka and Shamsul Huq, the presidential adviser for foreign affairs, was sent to New Delhi. India responded by sending the new defence minister Jagjivan Ram to Dhaka. This paved the way for the meeting of the top leadership in London and a sub-continental détente. During this phase, on 5 November 1977, the agreement on Farakka was signed by India and Bangladesh. There were no major border incidents. The thaw in the relationship was interpreted in Bangladesh as the keenness of the Janata Party government to cultivate Dhaka. There were no major problems in the bilateral relationship even when Indira Gandhi returned to power in January 1980. President Neelam Sanjiva Reddy emphasized the need for regional stability and cooperation between sub-continental states. But the economic relations could not keep pace with political developments and trade between the two countries continued based on the Agreement signed on 5 July 1973. Bangladesh resented the imbalance in trade relations which continued to affect political relations.

Restoration of Democracy and Gradual Improvement in Bilateral Relations

After prolonged military rule (1975-1990) parliamentary democracy was restored in Bangladesh in 1991. The bilateral relations however could not improve immediately, as after the general elections, a Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)-led government was formed. In

the past, for a very long time, Bangladesh offered tacit support to insurgents and terrorists who were active in India's northeast. The rise of Islamism in Bangladesh was also a concern for India. This situation continued during the BNP's rule.

There was no major progress in the bilateral relations even when Sheikh Hasina was in power (1996-2001). She could not act decisively against Islamists and Indian insurgent groups. Perhaps, she feared that the opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) would brand her as pro-India, thereby hampering her electoral prospects. In any case, Hasina was leading a coalition government. The bilateral relationship nosedived when the BNP-led four-party alliance was in power from 2001-2006 and the Jamaat-e-Islami was part of the government. Though it had only two ministers in the coalition government, the Jamaat was actually dictating terms to it and controlling it. The Jamaat used this period to Islamise the society and strengthen anti-India forces in Bangladesh.

Fortunately, some of India's concerns had been addressed when an India-friendly Sheikh Hasina government came to power in Bangladesh in 2009. It seems that Hasina's landslide victory and the BNP- sponsored terror attacks directed at her during the four-party coalition rule made her more resolute against terror.

Immediately after assuming power in January 2009, Sheikh Hasina announced that there would be zero tolerance for terrorists operating either within Bangladesh or using its territory to launch terror operations against other countries. After that, there was a dramatic change in counter-terror co-operation between India and Bangladesh. Bangladesh took significant steps against Indian insurgent groups and handed over several top leaders of Indian insurgent groups active in northeast India. Besides, it also acted against religious extremist groups, exposing their network in the sub-continent. This addressed a longstanding Indian complaint that Bangladesh was serving as a safe haven for such groups.⁸ Such cooperation has considerably weakened insurgent groups in northeast India. Her action against the Jihadists has also been exemplary.⁹ Besides, there has also been significant improvement in transit and connectivity between the two countries. The longstanding

land boundary and the maritime border disputes have also been sorted out.

Sheikh Hasina has now been in power for three consecutive terms. The Awami League emerged victorious in the 2014 and 2018 elections. Now the bilateral relationship has acquired a semblance of stability. Some people even go as far as to say that both countries are having their best ever relationship. In spite of such bonhomie, till date, India and Bangladesh do not have any major defence partnership.

India seen as a Potential Threat

India has never used its politico-military resources against Bangladesh to its detriment. In fact, the Indian military was used to end the atrocities faced by its people in 1971. Still in the perception of the security establishment of Bangladesh, India remains a potential threat. Bangladesh is geographically surrounded by Indian states from three sides. Thus, geographically it is India-locked. Bangladesh considers India as a potential security threat just because of its sheer size. It is also concerned by India's economic and military power. Bangladesh views India's growing naval strength as a threat. The amalgamation of Sikkim with India in 1974 and the subsequent nuclear test were also perceived negatively in Bangladesh.

Bangladesh Alleges India wants Paramount Position in South Asia

India as a responsible nation believes in the sovereign equality of all countries. The section of the Bangladeshi population that is hostile to India alleges that India wants the major external powers as well as states of the region to accept its paramount position in South Asia's economic, political, and security systems. They claim that to pursue this objective India insists on bilateral relations with neighbours which could involve them in Indian economic and security systems in a cooperative but inevitably subordinate relationship. They also allege that India tends to intervene in the domestic affairs of its neighbours on the pretext of maintaining a stable regional political system.

India has tried to comfort Bangladesh by saying that it has never been a predatory state nor has it been an expansionist power that tries to dominate others. India has also taken several steps to boost confidence and trust but its efforts to reassure Bangladesh have largely remained unsuccessful.

India had signed a treaty of peace and friendship with Bangladesh. Unfortunately, this treaty itself became a cause of resentment in Bangladesh. India also has similar treaties with Bhutan and Nepal. The treaty with Bangladesh was meant to hold initially for 25 years. This treaty lapsed in 1997 and no attempt was made to renew it despite the India-friendly Awami League being in power. India also didn't make any attempt to renew the treaty seeing the disinterest within Bangladesh. Bangladesh in 2002 went on to sign a defence treaty with China.

India wants a stable South Asia. It has helped countries in the past to overcome their internal instabilities. In 1988, India sent military assistance to the Maldives when Maumoon Abdul Gayoom's regime was threatened by PLOTE, a rebel Tamil group from Sri Lanka.

Some Bangladeshi experts allege that India has promoted regional organisations like SAARC to dominate the smaller states. On the other hand, some Indian experts argue that SAARC was promoted by Bangladesh so that it can team-up with other smaller South Asian countries against India. It is hardly surprising that SAARC has not been successful.

India has emerged as a major factor in domestic Bangladeshi politics. In fact, in many ways, India is the central issue around which Bangladeshi political parties define their foreign policy agenda. Over the years, political parties opposing the Awami League have tended to define themselves as opposing India. Moreover, radical Islamic groups in Bangladesh have tried to buttress their own "Islamic identity" by attacking India.¹⁰

Bangladesh's Structural Response to Perceived Threat from India

To deal with its larger neighbour Bangladesh could have developed a close relationship with it, or it could have simply remained indifferent, but it chose to follow a policy of creating a strong political and

military deterrence to its perceived potential adversary. To create political deterrence, it has tried to develop an array of international linkages that would enhance global stakes and interests, and reduce the power-gap with her neighbour. It is also trying to boost its defence capabilities to create military deterrence under the Forces Goal 2030 by seeking help from countries like China, Russia and the US.

To bolster her sense of security Bangladesh finds it necessary to build external linkages. This policy is being consistently followed even in the absence of specific threats. There have been ups and downs in the relationship depending on the regimes in power in both countries. But even when a regional détente or a peaceful relationship exists, it only moderates the intensity of the search for linkages and does not eliminate it. It thinks that issues like illegal migration or river water sharing can upset the détente in the sub-continent. Bangladesh's search for extra-regional linkages involves her interactions with several actors in the global arena – especially the United States, China, and the countries of the Middle East.

Bangladesh now also views India's growing naval strength as a threat. The Indian Ocean became a theatre of superpower conflicts following the withdrawal of the British from the East of Suez in 1968. This region saw incessant military build-ups in and around the area which had its repercussions on the South Asian region.

In the early years of independence, Bangladesh supported the idea of the Indian Ocean as a zone of peace for two reasons. First, since Indo-Bangladesh relations then were raised to the level of a 'special relationship' sealed by a 25-year friendship treaty, India was not considered a threat to Bangladesh's security and therefore Indian naval ambition and its effects on Bangladesh's maritime interests were not factors in Bangladesh's security calculations. Bangladesh's interests concerning the Indian Ocean coincided with that of India.

Second, the then government saw Bangladesh's war of independence as a struggle against economic and political exploitation which was equated with Western imperialism. It was, therefore, natural for the government to take a position against the Western military presence in the Indian Ocean.

This policy, however, changed with the fall of the Mujib government, which also brought about a reversal in the Indian attitude towards Bangladesh. The perception of India in Bangladesh radically changed from that of a benefactor to that of a powerful adversary whose interests are at considerable variance with those of Bangladesh. Since then the enthusiasm for converting the Indian Ocean into a zone of peace has waned.

India has emerged as the dominant naval power in the region by commissioning Andaman as a naval base. It has added nuclear-powered submarines and new aircraft carriers. Bangladesh is no match for the Indian navy in protecting its interests at sea. Bangladesh thinks that India's growing naval strength has further constrained its advantage. Bangladesh considers it pragmatic to be wary of Indian naval ambitions. When the maritime dispute was raging, it was argued that India can use its growing naval might and its readiness to force an issue if need be.

Under the changed circumstances, Bangladesh considers the presence of navies of major powers in the Indian Ocean to be in its interest. It looks at such a presence as an important tool to check the ambitions of regional navies. It viewed the conversion of Diego Garcia to an American naval base as a necessary deterrent to regional naval ambitions. Now it wants to bring China in the Indian Ocean and the Bay of Bengal. Bangladesh now thinks that it should carefully weigh its interests in the context of regional realities and adopt policies regarding the Indian Ocean and the Law of the Sea accordingly. Thus Bangladesh is not averse to the presence of the US or Chinese navy in the Indian Ocean which could be used as leverage against possible threats from India.

Bangladesh-India Military and Defence Partnership

A military and defence partnership between two countries generally centres on defence exports, joint exercises and training between the armed forces. As Bangladesh perceives India as a potential threat, no meaningful military and defence relationship has developed between the two countries. Indian exports to Bangladesh previously centred on ammunitions, firearms, and stores produced by the state-owned

Ordnance Factory Board. Bangladesh is also reluctant to engage in training or joint exercises with Indian forces.

Though the bilateral relationship between India and Bangladesh has considerably improved and acquired a semblance of stability after the Sheikh Hasina government returned to power in 2019 for the third consecutive time, there is no similar progress in the area of defence partnership. Meanwhile, there has also been a change in the nature of the Bangladeshi military as locally trained officers take senior positions. The participation of the military in the UN peacekeeping operations has also left a positive impact as they get exposed to democratic values and cordial civil-military relations. Despite all that, the Bangladesh military is still politically divided. The military officers are divided on the basis of their support to the two main political parties. This division is not so much based on ideology, rather they have developed these linkages to boost their careers in the military. Thus the military keeps influencing its foreign and security policies and remains an important factor in the politics of Bangladesh.

The perception of the Bangladeshi military of India being a potential threat has led to the country approaching China to fulfil its defence requirements. China happily accepted this role and Bangladesh has emerged as a huge market for the Chinese arms industry. This relationship also serves another objective of China of keeping India preoccupied in South Asia. China now supplies almost 80 percent of the country's military hardware requirements. This causes some discomfort in New Delhi. India is especially concerned after Bangladesh acquired two submarines from China. India was also apprehensive that these submarines will bring in their wake Chinese experts for construction of the submarine base which can be used by China in the future. This apprehension has proved to be true and this act of Bangladesh is viewed in India as provocative, especially when after the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (ITLOS) verdict, Bangladesh's maritime disputes with Myanmar and India were sorted out.

To build trust and confidence between the security forces of the two countries India mooted the idea of greater defence cooperation with greater defence cooperation with Bangladesh. With this

objective Manohar Parikkar, who was then defence minister of India, visited Dhaka in December 2016. Subsequently, in February 2017 India proposed a comprehensive 25-year agreement on defence cooperation during the visit of then Indian Foreign Secretary Subrahmanyam Jaishankar to Dhaka.¹¹ But Bangladesh appeared reluctant to sign a defence pact with India.

India's Proposed Defence Pact

The proposed long-term comprehensive defence pact with Bangladesh reportedly encompassed training, sale of military hardware, and a wide range of military-to-military cooperation.¹² It was also claimed in the reports that India wanted coordinated operations against mutually perceived threats. Along with the military cooperation agreement, India also offered a US\$ 500 million line of credit to Bangladesh for the purchase of military hardware, including purchasing of fast patrol craft for the coastguards, radar, and other items for air defence.

Dhaka however remained reluctant to sign such an agreement in the area of defence and preferred to sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), which would be less formal and would have no time- frame. Some Bangladeshi experts argued that “a treaty would inevitably restrict the strategic options for the country, whatever the positives of such an arrangement might be.”¹³

While Bangladesh showed reluctance to sign a defence agreement with India, the country has an umbrella agreement on defence cooperation with China that was signed in December 2002 when then Prime Minister and BNP leader Khaleda Zia had visited China. Under this agreement, Bangladesh is buying arms, equipment, tanks, frigates, fighter jets, and submarines from China.

The section of Bangladeshi experts who are hostile to India or view India as a potential enemy think that it would be unwise for Bangladesh to build its defence with Indian cooperation.¹⁴ They feel that Bangladesh has been using Chinese weapons for a long time and it would be difficult for them to adjust to new sources. Moreover, India as one of the largest importers of weapons may not have a surplus to meet the requirements of Bangladesh. Its weapons also may

not be of the “standard” needed by Bangladesh. Finally, often in the purchasing of weapons “price is not necessarily the overriding factor that determines one’s choice”.¹⁵ It was also pointed out that in the case of India and Bangladesh, while some threats may be perceived as mutual, others may not be, and the intended manner of dealing with those may vary. These experts also don’t like the idea of forming a joint venture to develop Bangladeshi maritime infrastructure. They feel that their dockyards have become force multipliers in recent times and it will be difficult to decide “how much, if at all, should we share our strategic designs that motivate our defense schemes with a second party which is involved in our defense production?”.¹⁶

However, there is also an alternative view emerging in Bangladesh that a traditionally close defence relationship with China needs to be balanced by strengthening defence cooperation with India and Russia too. They argue that the time has come to reduce the country’s dependence on China for conventional military weapons and include other countries in the list. Dependence on a single source of supply for defence equipment will create vulnerability and it would be safer to create multiple sources. Though the Chinese lobby is very strong in Bangladesh, the country has already inked its biggest arms contract worth US\$ 1 billion with Russia in January 2013 and is also planning to procure eight multi-role combat aircraft from Russia for the Bangladesh Air Force.

Bangladesh’s military officials are however not keen on purchasing defence hardware from India. They think that India itself is relying on military imports and has very few quality products of its own to offer. They point to the poor quality of equipment India supplied to Nepal and Myanmar while admiring Chinese equipment for being cheap and easy to use.

Though the relationship between Indian and Bangladeshi defence forces is improving, Sheikh Hasina is not keen to push the military on the issue of defence cooperation with India.¹⁷ Bangladesh has a history of military coups, beginning with the assassination of Hasina’s father Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, and most of her family in 1975. In recent years, civil-military relations have matured but Hasina still prefers not to cross the line and goes by the military’s

advice on defence issues.

Hasina is also keen to strike a balance between her country's relations with China and India. While India has been a traditional ally for Awami League governments in Dhaka, China has emerged as a key source of development funds and defence hardware. Hasina also does not want to upset the army by going for a defence agreement with India. Agreeing to an MOU rather than a long-term agreement on defence cooperation struck the right balance.

Defence Exports and Credit Line

In general, India has not been a major exporter of defence equipment and in 2015-16 its international military sales were only worth US\$ 300 million. Even in the case of Bangladesh, India has so far not supplied any major platforms and most of its exports are limited to ammunition, firearms, and stores produced by India's state-owned Ordnance Factory Board. However, now India is targeting annual defence exports worth more than US\$ 2 billion within the next few years. There is growing international interest in Indian missile systems, artillery, and naval vessels. At least 17 countries are reportedly in a discussion with Indian naval shipyards about potential sales. These countries include Bangladesh, the United Arab Emirates and Vietnam.¹⁸ Defence sales to Bangladesh are important for strategic reasons also, where China, India's strategic rival, is a major supplier of military hardware.

Besides direct military sales, India is also interested in helping Bangladesh produce naval vessels at its shipyards. In 2018, the Indian state-owned naval shipyard, Garden Reach Shipbuilders & Engineers (GRSE), signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to assist Bangladesh's Khulna Shipyard Limited (KSY) in designing and building warships.¹⁹

To boost India's defence exports to Bangladesh, in November 2019, the Export-Import Bank (Exim Bank) of India made available a credit line of US\$ 500 million to procure defence equipment.²⁰ The funds were made available based on an agreement signed with the Armed Forces Division of the Government of Bangladesh and the

line of credit is effective for 10 years from 7 November 2019.

Under the arrangement, Bangladesh is expected to source at least 75 per cent of defence goods and services from India and it can procure the remainder from other suppliers. Under the agreement, the prices of goods and services could be reduced by up to 75 per cent. India is also willing to consider further reductions on a case-to-case basis. Prime Minister Modi promised that this line of credit would be guided by Bangladesh's needs and priorities. Perhaps, it was hoped that this kind of subsidy to Bangladesh would encourage the country to source defence equipment from India.

Bangladesh however, didn't appear very enthusiastic to use this line of credit and the Indian external affairs minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar had to request Bangladesh to utilise the line of credit extended by India for purchasing military equipment when he visited Dhaka in August 2019. Bangladesh foreign minister AK Abdul Momen stated that Dhaka was yet to buy anything under the defence MoU.²¹ However, he also informed that the Armed Forces Division was looking into the matter. Some Bangladeshi experts wondered why India was offering this line of credit to Bangladesh when "India needs every penny to refurbish its arsenal, a good percentage of which is becoming obsolescent."²²

Though the policy of offering line of credit to boost defence exports to Bangladesh has not been very successful so far, India has nonetheless started a general policy to offer this kind of credit to many other countries in the Asia-Pacific region to boost its defence exports. India has now also started a new standard operating procedure (SOP) to its defence export customers whereby Indian defence equipment would be offered at the same price at which it is offered to the Indian Armed Forces. This is aimed at reducing the bureaucratic red tape associated with Indian export deals, making it easier for India and its defense customers to finalise contracts through credit.²³

Proposal to Deploy Coastal Surveillance Radar Systems

The PLA Navy has been deploying warships in the Indian Ocean since 2013 claiming to support anti-piracy operations in the Gulf of

Aden. In 2015, India offered a proposal to Bangladesh to install the coastal surveillance radar system. At that time, the proposal could not materialise as Dhaka was worried about the possibility of its implications on its relations with Beijing.²⁴

The activity of the PLA Navy has since intensified in the Indian Ocean. During the Doklam crisis in western Bhutan the PLA Navy had 14 warships and as many as seven submarines in the Indian Ocean during the 72-day-long stand-off. In 2018, a Type O39A Yuan-class submarine of the Chinese PLAN was detected in the Indian Ocean in 2018.²⁵ The spy planes of the Indian Navy in September 2019 tracked seven Chinese PLAN warships operating in and around the Indian Ocean region.

To develop a closer maritime security relationship between India and Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina and Narendra Modi signed a MoU to install a coastal surveillance radar system in Bangladesh in October 2019. Bangladesh presently has no coastal surveillance system in place. Reports suggested that at least 20 radar units would be installed along Bangladesh's 580 km coastline.²⁶ India has earlier provided such systems to Mauritius, Seychelles, Maldives, and is planning one in Myanmar. The coastal surveillance system was also likely to pave way for an Indo-Bangladesh White Shipping Agreement in the future.²⁷ It would also help Bangladesh safeguard its sovereignty in its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).

The network of coastal radars would prove to be a strategic asset for India and help the Indian Navy to detect and respond to any threat to its national security and sovereignty. Radars will be useful in detecting any seaborne terrorist attack along India's eastern coastline and also keep a watch on its maritime neighbourhood, where warships from the Chinese People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) have been frequently deployed over the past few years.

Some Bangladeshi experts however have once again expressed concern about its impact on Bangladesh's relationship with China. They think that China will consider this a programme hostile to it, as its activity in the Bay of Bengal would be under surveillance. They want Bangladesh to have full control over the data generated, even if the radars are given as a "gift."²⁸

Joint Military Exercises

India and Bangladesh have started an important military and diplomatic initiative under the SAMPRITI series of the joint exercises. It is hosted alternatively by both countries. The first exercise in this series was conducted in 2010 at Jorhat in Assam.²⁹ These exercises often focus on counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency operations in semi-mountainous and jungle terrain. Concerns over cross-border terrorism have increased of late with the unearthing of several Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) and Islamic State (IS) hideouts in Bengal.³⁰ In February 2020, the armies of India and Bangladesh participated in the 9th edition of the joint Exercise at Umroi, Meghalaya. Apart from training together at the tactical level, a greater cultural understanding was also emphasized during the SAMPRITI IX to strengthen military trust and cooperation between the two nations.³¹

In recent times, the interaction between the Indian and Bangladesh Navy has increased. The Indian Navy has raised the frequency of its port calls and passing exercises with the Bangladesh Navy and carried out training initiatives as well as capacity-building and capacity-enhancement activities.³²

To further augment bilateral naval ties, the Indian Naval Chief of Staff, Admiral Sunil Lanba's visited Dhaka and Khulna in June 2018. During his visit, the navies of the two countries established a co-ordinated patrol regime along their contiguous maritime boundaries aimed at countering terrorism, piracy, smuggling, and illegal fishing.³³

Despite all these interactions, the Bangladesh's military appears lukewarm to engage with their Indian counterparts. For instance, when the Indian Navy interacted with the Bangladeshi Navy in Vishakhapatnam from 16 to 19 October 2019, the Indian Navy called it a joint exercise whereas the Bangladesh Navy denied this. They claimed that no joint exercise had taken place; rather it was only a joint patrolling.³⁴

Concluding Remarks

India and Bangladesh have enjoyed a checkered political relationship depending on who is in power in Bangladesh; however, the deep

state in Bangladesh comprising its military, intelligence, bureaucracy and even Islamists, have always been consistent in their hostility towards India. India has been seen as a potential threat by them. The foreign and security policy of Bangladesh has always been geared to meet this possible challenge. Though India has never posed any military threat to Bangladesh, the people who are hostile to India in Bangladesh fear that their animosity might at some point provoke a larger and much stronger India to take action against India-locked Bangladesh. They want the Bangladesh military to prepare for that possibility.

In Bangladesh, the BNP is openly hostile to India, while the Awami League is seen as India-friendly. But even the Awami League seeks reinsurance from China as regards security concerns. In recent years, there has been a significant improvement in civil-military relations in Bangladesh; despite that, the military has not stopped meddling in Bangladeshi politics. The Bangladesh military has only mellowed a bit to keep its UN peacekeeping assignments going or growing.

In recent years, India, under its neighbourhood first policy, has taken several steps to improve its relations with Bangladesh. It has sorted out the land border and the maritime border disputes with Bangladesh. Both these issues were settled at a considerable disadvantage to India. But the deep state in Bangladesh ensures that some amount of hostility is always present against India in Bangladesh. Now it is highlighting the issue of sharing of the Teesta Waters, where expected progress has not been made because the West Bengal government is also a party to the dispute.

When the maritime border dispute with both India and Myanmar was settled after the ITLOS verdict, Bangladesh actually took a provocative step and acquired two submarines from China. Submarines are offensive weapons of sea denial. This step by Bangladesh is likely to endanger the security environment in the Bay of Bengal, where the Chinese submarines have been seen. It is quite possible that the submarine base now being constructed by China in Bangladesh might also be used by the Chinese.

India is unlikely to replace China as Bangladesh's primary defence supplier in near future. It will probably increasingly compete for military procurement projects in Bangladesh. The Bangladeshi Coast Guard lacks patrol boats. There is a need to monitor the migration of the Rohingyas from Myanmar, for which the patrol boats provided or developed in collaboration with India could be useful. However, any deals in the defence sector would be vulnerable if there is a change of government in Bangladesh. Any future government, either led by the BNP or any other political party having a similar orientation, would intensely scrutinise deals due to their traditional anti-India stance.

India has tried to rope-in Bangladesh in a defence agreement similar to the one that already exists between China and Bangladesh. But Bangladesh is reluctant to have this kind of agreement with India; the deep state of Bangladesh is strongly against it. Even Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has not been able to go against this desire of the military. India is now not being used as an enemy in the war games of the Bangladeshi army, but it does not mean that its war-fighting capability is not being created considering India as an adversary.

Notes

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3. China, a Pre-eminent Defence Partner of Bangladesh

China has become a major defence partner of Bangladesh, though it had played an adversarial role in the liberation of the country. To a large extent, this situation emerged because India was presented as a potential threat to the sovereignty and security of Bangladesh by its deep state immediately after liberation. Bangladesh was unable to use one of the super powers against India as Pakistan had done by entering into a military alliance because of the global détente taking place at this time, characterised by the signing of treaties such as SALT I and the Helsinki Accords. This global détente ended after the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan.

Once liberated, Bangladesh could have even allied with Pakistan, but a diminished Pakistan had a substantial power gap with India and was not of much use. In these circumstances, China suited the requirements of Bangladesh. The prevailing state of Sino-Indian relations was an added advantage. Dhaka wanted to exploit this situation and established links with Beijing which ultimately resulted in both countries developing a close defence partnership.

China Seen as a Source of Support for Bangladesh

Bangladesh's primary interest in China is to use it as a source of support in case of a potential threat from India. China's support would be a significant accretion of power for Bangladesh. Though China and Bangladesh are not contiguous neighbours, Bangladesh believes that in case of need, China can come to its rescue through the small territory in Northeast India that separates both countries.

In Bangladesh's calculation, both India and China are going to be leading powers of comparable size from the developing world but have different values and systems. This will make them have an essentially adversarial relationship, though the intensity of this rivalry and competition may vary from time to time.

China has also been seen as useful by Bangladesh against Myanmar and the global community. Unlike Pakistan, for Bangladesh China is the only major ally. In the case of Pakistan, it could also rely on the United States, but this option was not available to Bangladesh; the China connection was all the more critical for Bangladesh.

However, the limitation of China-Bangladesh partnership became apparent on the Rohingya issue. The Rohingyas living in Myanmar were pushed out and became refugees in Bangladesh. Both Myanmar and Bangladesh are leading importers of Chinese weapons. They have the same strategic value for China. Faced with this situation, China supported Myanmar at international fora and also sent relief supplies to the Rohingyas. China clearly preferred Myanmar over Bangladesh. To that extent, the Bangladeshis now have a reduced comfort level with China.¹ The importance of China for Bangladesh is more vis-à-vis India than Myanmar.

Besides, China also has its red lines where it does not compromise. For instance, it would not allow Bangladesh opening up with Taiwan, and has reacted adversely to one such effort, forcing Bangladesh to ultimately relent. It wants other countries to strictly observe its "One China Policy". To that extent it also creates a constraint on the foreign policies of other countries including that of Bangladesh.

Bangladesh Takes Pragmatic Approach towards China

Bangladesh tried to establish its relationship with China based on pragmatism in the aftermath of the liberation war keeping in view the importance of the country in the geo-politics of South Asia.

No Demonisation of China after the Liberation War

Despite the adversarial role played by China during the liberation war of Bangladesh it was not demonised either by the Bangladeshi political leaders or its bureaucracy. A section of Bangladeshi

political leaders and bureaucrats interpreted the Chinese role during the liberation war in a nuanced way so that its role appears less adversarial. They argued that China did not support the Pakistani approach of a military solution to the East Pakistan imbroglio, but it supported Pakistan at the international level to oppose the Indo-Soviet plans that seemed to be leading to a break-up of the Pakistani state.² It is also argued that China took this stand because it thought that support to Bangladesh might spur the secessionist tendencies of different ethnic communities in China including those in Tibet and the Muslim (Uighur)-populated Xinjiang province. Pakistan was also facilitating the normalisation of relations between China and the US. China reciprocated with its support during the crisis. China was also uneasy with the convergence of Indo-Soviet interests on the Bangladesh issue.³

The pro-China lobby in Bangladesh points out that though in the sub-continental crisis of 1971, China preferred a united Pakistan, it was not averse to the Awami League coming to power in a united Pakistan. Actually, some Awami League leaders enjoyed a good personal relationship with Beijing. Even though President Ayub Khan was seen as the main inspiration behind Pakistan's China policy, the process was actually started by Prime Minister H.S. Suhrawardy of the Awami League, a Bengali who had visited China in the mid-1950s. Chinese Premier Zhou En Lai undertook a successful visit to Dhaka in 1956 when an Awami League-led government headed by Ataur Rahman Khan was in office in East Pakistan.⁴ These early linkages helped create amity with China after the liberation of Bangladesh despite its hostility at the time of the founding of Bangladesh.

In Bangladeshi policy making circles, there was already an appreciation of the importance of China. This led to a China policy whereby Bangladeshi leaders carefully eschewed all criticism of Beijing in the immediate post-independence period. Chinese officials in the Consulate in Dhaka were given complete safe conduct out of the country. Mujib tried to mollify the Chinese leadership by expressing high regard for them; Bangladeshi Foreign Minister Abdus Samad Azad stated that they have extended their hands of friendship towards China.

The Chinese however remained slow in reciprocating the Bangladeshi gesture. They vetoed the Bangladeshi application for UN membership. Still, Bangladesh tried not to annoy China by publicly criticising it. Dhaka's understanding of the situation was that China was now trying to make up for not supporting Pakistan militarily by giving strong diplomatic support. Dhaka continued to send feelers to China by trying to develop a close relationship with all its socialist neighbours and even directly appealing to China for friendship. The desperation to develop a close relationship with China was seen when Mujib stated his desire in Tokyo to develop a friendly relationship with the great neighbour, China. However, the issue of the Prisoners of War (PoW) remained the principal hurdle in taking the relationship forward.

China's opposition to Bangladesh softened in February 1974 when both Pakistan and Bangladesh recognised each other. After that Bangladesh's application to the UN was unanimously approved on 7 June 1974. Still, China wanted Bangladesh to solve outstanding issues with Pakistan before actual recognition and establishment of diplomatic links. It was too close to Pakistan to consider recognising Bangladesh without the latter's approval. Dhaka on the other hand hoped to use Beijing for the solution of such outstanding issues as the settlement of assets. It tried to establish an economic link even in the absence of formal diplomatic relations and sent a trade delegation to China. Bangladesh also placed an old China hand, K.M. Kaiser, as ambassador to Rangoon. Kaiser also visited Beijing.

Mujib's overthrow in August 1975 dramatically changed the China-Bangladesh relationship. Beijing viewed it as an embarrassment of India and the Soviet Union. Dhaka at that juncture tried to improve the relationship with Pakistan and the Middle East. There was also a decline in relations with India. All this left a positive impact on the China-Bangladesh relationship, resulting in the establishment of diplomatic relations on 6 October 1975.

China indeed disliked the dismemberment of its close ally Pakistan but this also presented a new opportunity of having a friend in the form of another sovereign state on India's flank. This new situation was far more palatable from the Chinese perspective.

China has been playing a balancing role in South Asia. It has been using smaller South Asian countries like Pakistan, Nepal, and Sri Lanka vis-à-vis much larger India for its geopolitical interests. It applied the same policy with Bangladesh too.

Beginning of the Partnership

The Sino-Bangladesh bilateral relationship took off once the war-related issues were laid to rest. It now appeared that Bangladesh has inherited a close relationship with China from Pakistan. However, there was one major difference. While Pakistan viewed China as a counterpoint to India, in Bangladesh it was dependent on the party in power. China is viewed as a counterpoint by the BNP, but the Awami League favours a parallel relationship along with that of India, seeing China as a kind of ‘reinsurance’.

Thus at the political level, there has been a consensus among the prominent political parties in Bangladesh about the approach to be taken towards China. This consensus is not available vis-à-vis India, about which the Awami League was clearly positive, and the BNP was not.

At the bureaucratic level, senior officials in Dhaka have had a long experience of dealing with China dating back to Pakistan days. They found no difficulty after the initial period in reverting to a policy they had always been used to. Even the armed forces have had experience with Chinese hardware and China once again became a source of procurement. China’s refusal to be drawn into Bangladesh’s domestic political issues made them further comfortable.

In the late 1970s, General Ziaur Rahman (the founder of the BNP and husband of the current BNP leader Begum Zia) was strongly supported by Beijing in the dispute with India on the Farakka Barrage. The relationship continued through all governments in Bangladesh. After Ziaur Rahman, President General H.M. Ershad was warmly received in Beijing in the 1980s. During the 1990s, first BNP leader Begum Khaleda Zia was in power followed by Awami League leader Sheikh Hasina. Both developed strong links with China. Begum Zia signed a Defence Cooperation Agreement with Beijing in 2002 and considerable arms procurement by Bangladesh from

China began taking place, as was the case with Pakistan. To signify strong ties between the two nations, the year 2005 was declared the ‘Bangladesh-China Friendship Year’. The camaraderie continued even during the regime of Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed who headed the Caretaker Government in Bangladesh. When he visited Beijing in 2008, President Hu Jintao of China described bilateral relations as being based on a “comprehensive partnership for cooperation”.

Military Security Interests in Bangladesh-China Relations

Bangladesh-China cooperation becomes extremely important for the military aspect of Bangladesh’s national security. Since liberation, there has never been any serious threat to either territorial integrity or political independence of Bangladesh. If anything, the geographical area of Bangladesh has only expanded after both India and Bangladesh decided to sort out their border issues. Enclaves were exchanged which added nearly 10,000 acres of land to the territory of Bangladesh.⁵ Similarly, the maritime boundary of Bangladesh has also expanded after the two ITLOS verdicts. These verdicts have settled a maritime dispute with its two proximate neighbours – India and Myanmar.

Interestingly, despite the settlement of disputes with India and Myanmar, Bangladesh still sees them as sources of potential military confrontation. It wants to attain substantial military capabilities to deter any possible infringement of its territorial integrity or political independence by any potential external aggressor.

To create this military capability Bangladesh looks to China for arms. In the last few decades, China has seen huge economic growth and the ongoing modernisation of its military has enabled China to emerge as a major player in the global arms trade. For a long time, China has been a major importer of conventional weapons but this situation has dramatically changed in the last decade during which China has emerged as a net arms exporter. China has exported conventional weapons worth US\$ 15.7 billion between 2008 and 2018 to various countries of the world. This has made it the fifth-largest arms exporter in the world after the United States, Russia, Germany and France.

According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), China's conventional arms sales have increased from US\$ 645 million in 2008 to US\$ 1.04 billion in 2018. During this period most of the weapons have gone to Asia and then to Africa. Though there is a huge jump in the Chinese share, it is still far behind the United States whose average annual export during the last ten years has been over US\$ 9 billion. Most of Beijing's arms have been sold to the countries that are in its close geographical proximity. In the last 10 years, more than 60 per cent of the Chinese weapons have found their way to Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Myanmar. Other Asian countries have bought an additional 14 per cent of these weapons.

During this period China has also transitioned from being a supplier of low-cost, unsophisticated equipment to a provider of sophisticated wares. China's engagement with Thailand and Bangladesh shows that it has become a supplier of high-end weaponry and associated systems and is using it to take a lead over India in winning influence in the region.⁶

China-Bangladesh Defence Cooperation Agreement

Bangladesh signed a landmark bilateral Defence Cooperation Agreement in December 2002 when Begum Khaleda Zia as Prime Minister, visited China. The signing of this umbrella defence cooperation agreement made China the first country to have broad-based defence cooperation with Bangladesh. It was claimed that the pact was an effort to institutionalise existing agreements in the military field. It was also expected to 'rationalise' the existing piecemeal agreements to enhance cooperation in training, maintenance, and in some areas of production.⁷

Bangladesh's Preference for Chinese Arms

Bangladesh prefers Chinese arms over those from Western sources because Chinese arms are affordable and suitable funding options are provided. However, this preference cannot be solely explained by the demand-supply factor. Bangladesh also thinks that its growing engagement with China has political value as it creates nervousness for India that softens India's approach towards Bangladesh,

especially over the controversial issues. Moreover, India, a potential enemy, cannot be seen as a reliable source of arms supply in a crisis. Unlike the arms transfer policy of the Western states, Beijing follows a policy of non-interference in internal affairs. It chooses to overlook the recipient country's political or human rights situation. China's talk of a "century of humiliation" preceding the foundation of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949 and its repeated mention of Five Principles of Co-existence makes many smaller countries think that China would not interfere in their internal affairs. This makes China's arms market attractive to many countries.

However, the fact remains that China does not offer its funding with "no strings attached". It asks countries like Nepal to take action against Tibetan refugees. It asked Cambodia to repatriate Uighurs.⁸ Countries doing business with China have to acknowledge the "One China Policy". Bangladesh realised this when it tried to develop a relationship with Taiwan.⁹

Despite these limitations, Bangladesh apparently feels comfortable with the Chinese claim of non-interference and has sought to develop a defence partnership. China needs partners like Bangladesh for its programmes like the Belt Road Initiative (BRI) of which the BCIM-EC is a part. This understanding has provided a broader framework for both countries to cooperate in areas like maritime security, counter-terrorism, and UN peacekeeping missions, especially in matters of training.

China today has become the top source of arms for Bangladesh in modernising its armed forces. The Bangladesh Army has Chinese tanks, its Air Force has Chinese fighter jets, and its Navy has Chinese frigates and missile boats. Bangladesh is now the second-largest recipient of Chinese arms after Pakistan. Between 2008 and 2018, China provided weapons worth US\$ 1.93 billion to Bangladesh. This constitutes 71.8 per cent of Bangladesh's military acquisitions over this period. China offers competitive prices and generous loans to encourage procurement.¹⁰ In 2013 it transferred two used Type-035G Ming-class submarines to Bangladesh at a discounted price of just over US\$ 100 million each. Since 2006, China has also supplied Bangladesh with the majority of its small arms, totalling over 16,000 rifles and 4,100 pistols.¹¹

Some of the important weapons provided by China to Bangladesh in recent times are five maritime patrol vessels, two submarines, 16 fighter jets, and 44 tanks, as well as anti-ship and surface-to-air missiles.¹² Under Forces Goal 2030, the Bangladesh military has procured a range of land systems in recent years, with most acquired from China. These include MBT-2000 tanks, HQ-7B, and HQ-16A surface-to-air missiles systems, and the WS-22A multiple launch rocket systems.¹³

The military ties between the two countries have been further boosted by frequent high-level visits. An increasing number of Bangladesh armed forces personnel are receiving training from their Chinese counterparts. The training of these officers in China has produced in the Bangladesh armed forces – a powerful element in the policy-making stream – a key lobby for closer links with China.¹⁴ Defence agreements now also include provisions of cooperation in military technologies and defence production.

Bangladesh is now giving particular attention to boosting its naval capabilities. The country has won maritime boundary cases with Myanmar and India in 2012 and 2014 respectively, as per the ITLOS. This has given it control over a vast maritime area that includes the EEZ and the Continental Shelf. In this maritime area, it can drill for oil and gas. It can also tap other oceanic resources like minerals and fisheries. The country now sees enhancing naval capability as an urgent necessity. With this objective, it has acquired two Chinese submarines. The Bangladesh navy is now aiming to become a three-dimensional force and hopes to deter foreign infringement with this capability.

China's Motivation behind Offering Military Assistance to Bangladesh

There are a number of reasons behind China offering military assistance to Bangladesh. Some of them are enumerated below.

Commercial Orientation

Bangladesh is the second-largest importer of the Chinese arms and meets almost 80 per cent of the requirement from these. This helps

China earn valuable foreign exchange and also helps develop its military-industrial complex. However, the commercial motive is only one part of the answer and Chinese military assistance to Bangladesh cannot be fully explained by the demand-supply logic. There are a number of other complex and multifaceted motivations behind Beijing's arms transfers to Bangladesh and some other countries.

Defence Diplomacy

Defence diplomacy is generally understood as military assistance. During the Cold War period, rival powers used defence diplomacy as an instrument of expanding their spheres of political, economic and military influence in foreign states and counter the influence of their rivals. The objectives of defence diplomacy remain the same even in the post-Cold War era. Now, a few more aspects are added to it. It is used to build peacekeeping capacities of foreign militaries, particularly those participating in the UN peacekeeping operations. It also prepares foreign military forces for Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) operations so that they can effectively respond to natural disasters.

Chinese defence sales are usually strongly linked to strategic issues. It helps China bolster its influence in a specific country or region. Chinese defence sales are supported by factors including the low cost of Chinese products, China's flexible repayment mechanisms (including counter-trade), the provision of financial aid, its flexible approach to technology transfers and industrial collaboration, and the strategic ties it can offer to its defence customers, especially those that are not aligned with the United States.¹⁵

Quest for Comprehensive National Strength

To improve its economy and security, China adopted an open-door policy in the late 1970s. Chinese leaders felt that an economically weak country would be subjected to manipulation by others as in the present day, competition among various countries is essentially competition for overall national strength based on economic, scientific, and technological prowess. It was also believed that economic development was a key to consolidate the socialist system

and maintain long-term social stability which would have impact on the internal security situation. The collapse of the Soviet Union had clearly shown that military security was not sufficient to secure the future of a state.

The expanding Chinese economy needs access to foreign resources, particularly oil and gas. This economic imperative has created strong Chinese interest in assuring peaceful conditions in resource-rich countries of Africa and Central Asia. In these countries, military assistance has emerged as a powerful instrument of expanding Beijing's politico-economic and military influence beyond its borders. China views military assistance as a trade-off for access to the natural resources of the recipient countries.

The recipient countries, particularly those in the conflict-prone zone, can maintain peace and stability with this military assistance, which indirectly also helps Chinese interests by maintaining an uninterrupted supply of resources. Beijing claims that it is helping these countries to promote their "legitimate self-defence". Under the cover of such principles, Beijing's arms exports act as a tool of projecting power and influence, aimed at crafting strategic dependencies in countries that are vital to its interests. This also means the attenuated influence of China's rivals – i.e., India and the US – within the recipient countries.

A tool of Beijing's Diplomacy in South Asia

China's military assistance is also a tool of Beijing's diplomacy in South Asia as elsewhere. Chinese arms have maximum impact in South Asia, especially in countries that are geographically contiguous to arch-rival India. Countries like Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Myanmar have bought large quantities of Chinese arms. One of the core objectives of China's South Asia policy is to undermine India's regional influence. Its military assistance to Bangladesh is an instrument of such a policy. Chinese arms exports strengthen client-state relationships and bolster Beijing's influence. However, it's not clear whether China expects the Bangladesh military to deny any passage to the Indian military to northeast India through Bangladeshi territory during a potential conflict with China

Convergence Develops in Chinese and Bangladeshi Maritime Strategy

A convergence seems to be developing in China's Indian Ocean strategy and Bangladesh's naval strategy in the Bay of Bengal. China is pursuing its Indian Ocean strategy under the cover of its Maritime Silk Road (MSR) initiative. Through this strategy, it wants to protect its sea lanes of communication (SLOCs) and also seeks to undermine India's influence and that of the US in the Indian Ocean. Bangladesh weighs heavily in China's maritime strategy in the Indian Ocean. The Bangladesh navy now wants to be a three-dimensional force to protect its sea lanes of communication and resource-rich EEZ. It is now equipped with Chinese submarines and has to depend on China's technical assistance, particularly in building submarine facilities on the Bangladesh coast. These submarine facilities in Bangladesh could be used by China's submarine forces in the future, posing a threat to Indian security.

China Sees Strategic Benefit in Maritime Engagement

China's rapid economic development is generally attributed to the 'reform and opening up' policy adopted by Deng Xiaoping in the late 1970s. China's current leadership is very aware that continued economic growth underpins internal stability and is critically dependent upon the free flow of trade by sea. This requires China to deploy ships to protect Chinese merchant ships and to protect its SLOCs. It has also to ensure that there is no potential disruption to trade flows through key choke points, such as the Straits of Hormuz and Malacca. This has caused a strategic shift and China, which had earlier the outlook of a continental power, now wants to be a maritime power. However, a major maritime power must have potent naval forces. The recent creation of an Overseas Operations Office, acquisition of a deployable floating dock, and development of a support facility in Djibouti, all point to China improving its capacity to support overseas naval operations and exercises.¹⁶ China has been clear that the roles of the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) include trade protection, non-combatant evacuation operations (NEOs) involving Chinese nationals overseas, and

humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) tasks. Scenarios relating to such tasks are quite likely to involve maritime forces from several nations, so the PLAN now wants to practice and become proficient in operating in such contexts.

The Indian Ocean is an area of priority for China in its endeavour to emerge as a major maritime power. Beijing is trying to strengthen its relationship with the navies of Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka so that it can enhance its footprint in the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean. China also wants to increase its geopolitical influence in South Asia by strengthening its relationship with the militaries of the three South Asian countries.¹⁷ The Chinese Ambassador in Dhaka, Li Jun, observed that China was helping Bangladesh to strengthen its national defence mechanism under Bangladesh's defence strategy. He was of the view that the procurement of Chinese submarines by Bangladesh would help bring stability in the region.¹⁸

While serving its strategic interests, China also wants to do good business through its state-owned China Shipbuilding Industry Corporation (CSIC). The CSIC in 2017 unveiled a slew of new submarine concepts targeted at the export market. With a growing portfolio of submarine designs that cater to a broad spectrum of mission profiles, CSIC appears to be well-positioned to secure future regional customers, particularly countries that are unable to procure Western designs due to cost or political considerations. Bangladesh is one of them. It also plans to offer training, infrastructure support, and technology transfer.¹⁹

Bangladesh Attempts to Alter Regional Balance of Power

Bangladesh began viewing India's growing naval power as a potential threat soon after liberation. It gave up its policy of viewing the Indian Ocean as a zone of peace and welcomed the presence of extra-regional navies hoping to counter-balance the powerful presence of the Indian Navy. In December 1995, the Chief of Army Staff, Lt Gen Abu Saleh Mohammad Nasim expressed concern over the arms build-up by India and Myanmar, two neighbouring countries with whom Bangladesh shares borders. He stated that Bangladesh would like to avoid a civil war-like situation as in Sri Lanka. It would also

not like to be blockaded like Nepal by India for geopolitical gains.²⁰

Bangladesh had maritime boundary disputes with both India and Myanmar. Two international awards have settled these disputes in favour of Bangladesh. The International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (ITLOS) gave its ruling on 14 March 2012 on the maritime boundary between Bangladesh and Myanmar, which said, the border should be based on an equidistant line drawn from base points on the low water lines of the coasts of both countries. The ruling provided “clarity to prospective investors and clarified Bangladesh’s territorial waters, allowing certification of block boundaries.” In its verdict, the ITLOS awarded Bangladesh an area of 70,000 sq. km (30,888 sq. miles) in the Bay of Bengal. In the second verdict in July 2014, the Hague-based Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) awarded Bangladesh an area of 19,467 sq. km (7516 sq. miles) that settled its maritime boundary dispute with India. The two verdicts together gave Bangladesh a maritime territory of 111,631 sq. km (43,100 square miles), which is equal to the country’s landmass. Ironically, the settlement of these disputes has only encouraged Bangladesh to go for further modernisation of its navy. Bangladesh now wants not only to protect its SLOCs, but also the newly-acquired vast resource-rich EEZ.

Bangladesh is critically dependent upon shipping, either across the Bay of Bengal or via its vast riverine system based on the *Padma*, *Meghna* and *Jamuna* rivers. One of its main ports, Mongla, is 60 nm (97 km) upriver. Marine products (especially fish and shrimps) are an important part of the Bangladeshi diet, and also a vital export earner. The Bay of Bengal is a highly productive sea area and marine resources are very important to the country’s prosperity. Bangladesh is famed for its quality shrimp production, most of which is exported to Europe. Nearly 12 million people are directly dependent on the country’s fisheries.²¹

The Bay of Bengal is reported to have rich deposits of oil and natural gas. Geologists believe that Bangladesh’s exclusive economic zone in the Bay of Bengal holds one of the largest oil and gas reserves in the Asia-Pacific region. The exploration of this rich reserve has the potential of transforming Bangladesh into a major global hydro-

carbon producer. Bangladesh is now free to invite global tenders for oil and gas exploration in the Bay. Energy-hungry China is likely to be keen on joining hands with Bangladesh in oil and gas exploration in the Bay, bringing the two countries closer together. It will also have implications for India which shares both the land and maritime border with Bangladesh.

Bangladesh is acutely vulnerable to anything that threatens the approach to its various ports – as the Pakistanis discovered in 1971. An adversary dominating the Bay of Bengal could project power along Bangladesh's coastline, attack its shipping routes and threaten its ports, particularly Chittagong and Mongla, where over 150 ships dock every month. Bangladesh's economic prospects depend heavily on sea-based trade, so anything that threatens the latter is a threat to Bangladesh. There is also an important symbolic aspect to the protection of Bangladesh's small (about 300,000t) merchant marine fleet. The Bangladesh Navy wants to prepare for these potential challenges.

Bangladesh Navy Planning to become a Three-dimensional Force

To meet the potential security challenges the Bangladesh Navy wants to develop its war-fighting capability. It wants to develop undersea capabilities to enhance its sea denial posture around the shores.

The Bangladesh Navy has long had an interest in submarines. In the immediate aftermath of the liberation, many former submariners who had served in the Pakistan Navy before the 1971 war brought with them an awareness of the strategic weight which could be provided by submarine capability. Despite this interest and the desire to have fighting 'teeth', the Bangladesh naval service simply did not have the resources to develop and support a submarine force.²² The priorities of basic surveillance and response at sea, along with sea training, consumed the very limited funds available.

By the late 1970s, after the initial efforts to establish the new navy had been completed, the case for submarine capability was made to the government. However, no progress was made perhaps because of the lack of money and Bangladesh's caution about unknown and unproven Chinese capability.

The idea to develop a submarine resurfaced again in early 2004 when the BNP-led government was in power. Hafiz Uddin Ahmed, who was then Bangladesh's Minister for Defence, disclosed to the country's parliament the government's intention to have a four-boat fleet in service by 2012. The ambition of the Bangladesh Navy to have a "balanced three-dimensional force" was also expressed by Rear Admiral M. Hasan Ali Khan, Chief of Naval Staff in May 2006, though he lamented that the shortage of funding was hampering development.²³

The shortage of funds kept the Bangladesh Navy as a coastal defence force for a long time. In May 2004 the Navy had five active frigates, 27 fast attack craft (FACs) equipped with missiles, torpedoes or guns, and 14 seagoing patrol craft, all but four of which were designated as 'coastal'. It maintained a further five patrol craft for river work, five minesweepers, and a miscellany of support craft of various kinds. Its main bases were at Chittagong and Khulna and its strength was about 11,600 ratings and 1,000 officers.²⁴

However, a decade of economic growth has reduced the financial constraint. Moreover, Bangladesh is now increasingly in competition for energy resources in the Bay of Bengal. Bangladesh has identified substantial unexploited offshore oil and gas reserves in this area and has often accused neighbours Myanmar and India of infringement. China has a strategy of cultivating ties with nations that possess energy and raw material reserves, using defence industrial cooperation and the supply of material on advantageous terms to cement links. In March 2010, China and Bangladesh signed a memorandum of understanding for oil and gas cooperation that will see Chinese oil companies develop energy resources in Bangladesh. It would also explore the possibility of export of energy resources to China.²⁵

Following this, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina announced on 29 December 2010 that the Government of Bangladesh was considering a purchase of a submarine as part of further measures to secure the country's EEZ. According to Sheikh Hasina this was being planned to fulfil the Government's commitment to build a "three-dimensional and effective (naval) force".²⁶

The Sheikh Hasina-led Awami League Government after coming to power in January 2009 has been pursuing a strongly nationalist line and has allocated substantial funding to the armed forces to achieve its 'Forces Goal 2030'. The submarines are at the centre of the Navy's continuing effort within this goal to develop a 'three dimensional' maritime force.

Formal discussions were begun with China to affect major military modernisation. With this objective, the Bangladesh Navy has drawn up an ambitious expansion programme to raise the strength of its fleet to 150 ships by 2030. At present, it is in the midst of an ambitious 10-year development plan to transform it from a largely coastal defence force into a modern 'three-dimensional' navy comprising surface, undersea, and naval air elements, able to better protect Bangladesh's EEZ and bolster its sea-based economy.²⁷

The modernisation effort has brought about a major qualitative and quantitative improvement of capabilities of the Bangladesh Navy and has turned it into a three-dimensional force. As part of the plan, the Bangladesh Navy has inducted 19 vessels into its fleet over the past decade, including one Jianghu I- and two Jianghu III-class frigates, four Chinese-built Shadhinota-class corvettes, and two Ming-class submarines. The Bangladesh Navy also established a small naval air arm in 2011. They had acquired two Agusta Westland AW109E Power helicopters from Italy in 2011 and two Dornier 228NG maritime patrol aircraft (MPAs) from Germany in 2013. A new base, *BNS Sher-e-Bangla*, is under construction in Patuakhali and will become the Navy's largest naval base. A new submarine base, *BNS Sheikh Hasina*, is also under construction near Kutubdia Island.²⁸

Following the ITLOS ruling of March 2012, on 24 January 2013 Sheikh Hasina said the country would establish a submarine force to boost its presence and power projection in the Bay of Bengal. It was also disclosed that Bangladesh was in negotiations to buy submarines from China.²⁹ Hasina stated that her government decided to add submarines with base facilities to Bangladesh's navy so that it could be turned into a deterrent force and which could face any challenge during a war on Bangladeshi maritime boundary.³⁰

In 2013, Navy Chief Vice Admiral M. Farid Habib in his vision statement explained that the Bangladesh Navy will gradually develop its undersea capabilities to enhance sea-denial posture around its shores. The Bangladesh government finally announced on 20 December 2013 that the country has concluded an agreement with China to purchase two Type 035G Ming-class diesel-electric submarines valued at BT16 billion (US\$ 206 million). It was also believed that the country was building a submarine base on Kutubdia Island in southeastern Bangladesh in support of the procurement.³¹

The submarines were acquired from China in 2017 and were renamed as Nobojatra and Joyjatra. They were to be used to further intensify monitoring in the Bay and to enhance the force's combat capability. Bangladeshi naval personnel were trained and a sea trial was done before the submarines were delivered.

The Ming-class submarines are reverse-engineered from Soviet Project 633 or Romeo-class submarines sent to Beijing before the breaking of their political relation in 1962. By the 1970s these were considered obsolete compared to Western European and Soviet designs. The acquisition of Kilo-class diesel-electric submarines coupled with the steady modernisation of the entire PLAN forced the Mings to be retired. The Ming-class submarines are manufactured in northeast China for the past 40 years. Apparently, they are still made available to those customers who are on a tight budget. Its armament is modest and its vulnerability to current ASW systems is a serious concern. However, these submarines will not be the only such platforms that Bangladesh is planning to acquire. There is talk of acquiring Russian Kilo-class submarines as well.³²

Permanent base for Submarines

The Bangladesh Navy started persuading the Government to build a permanent submarine base once the Ming-class submarines acquired from China were commissioned in the Bay of Bengal. Presently, they are temporarily housed along the coast in Chittagong. In December 2014, Bangladesh started negotiating for a line of credit of US\$ 1 billion from Poly Technologies Inc. China for constructing naval bases and purchasing Chinese naval equipment and new naval

platforms.³³ As the submarines were sourced from China, the Bangladesh Navy was seeking their expertise to build the base. The whole agreement was concluded in great secrecy to avoid any outcry from India.³⁴

Subsequently, it was reported in May 2019 that Chinese state-owned company PTI would be constructing the base in Cox's Bazar. The company was appointed for the job through a Government-to-Government negotiation between Bangladesh and China. The construction of the permanent base, which would have facilities like wharfs, barracks, an ammunition depot, repairing arrangements, and training provisions, is expected to be completed in ten years, by the FY2027-28. The construction cost of the proposed permanent base for keeping and operating submarines has been estimated at BTd 10,300 crore.³⁵

This development was confirmed by retired Col. Faruk Khan, a senior official of the ruling Awami League and chairman of the parliamentary committee on foreign affairs. Perhaps anticipating that India would not like it, he also stated though the “Chinese will help build the base and impart training to Bangladeshi personnel to operate the submarines and base the Chinese submarines will not come here. The base would be used by Bangladeshi submarines.”³⁶

Facilities for submarines are also being developed at the new naval base *BNS Sher-e-Bangla* Patuakhali. This naval base is located at Rabnabad in Patuakhali and will have submarine berthing and operation facilities to ensure the security of the Payra Sea Port. This project is likely to be completed in June 2021 at an estimated cost of BTd 1,081.50 crore.

Though there is an attempt by a section in Bangladesh to underplay the acquisition of submarines by saying that they are refurbished old models, bought primarily for training purposes to boost the morale of the Navy, the acquisition has made Bangladesh a member of the elite club of 40 countries that have submarines. It is also argued that big defence purchases anywhere in the world are largely driven by the corruption of some vested interest group, mostly aligned with the party in power, rather than by any strategic interest. While it is true that defence deals often have a corruption

angle to them, the construction of a permanent submarine base indicated the desire of Bangladesh to go for a full submarine force at a future date because it doesn't make sense to create this kind of facility just for a couple of submarines.³⁷

A shift in Indian Ocean Strategic Balance

At present, the predominant concern of the Bangladesh Navy might be Myanmar because of their hostility over the exploitation of the hydrocarbon resources in the Bay of Bengal and the Rohingya issue.³⁸ In 2007-08, there was serious tension between the two countries and their naval forces came face to face with each other over the issue of oil exploration. Tension erupted again in 2017 over the Rohingya issue and as a consequence, a number of fighter jets and destroyers were deployed by Bangladesh along the border.

In the long-term, however, the possession of submarines by Bangladesh is going to affect the Indian Navy more than the Myanmar Navy. The presence of another submarine force in the Bay of Bengal will be at least an irritant for the Indian Navy. Submarines are offensive weapons of sea-denial and their only use would be to pose a threat. It will complicate India's maritime security paradigm.

China is likely to benefit in two ways by helping Bangladesh develop its submarine capability. Apart from continuing Beijing's long-term arms sales relationship with Bangladesh and augmenting its influence with the Bangladesh Navy, it will complicate India's local naval environment. It will also act as a constraint on the Indian Navy's efforts to 'look east' to the South China Sea.³⁹

What is far more serious for India is the possibility of China using Bangladesh's planned submarine base as a supply point for its submarines. They can act as another node in China's 'string of pearls' strategy. These submarines will bring in their wake Chinese trainers, infrastructure, and repair experts. These submarines will be docked in naval bases within as little as 500 nautical miles of Indian naval establishments. The Chinese are then expected to increase their tactical knowledge of Indian merchant as well as naval shipping.

The submarines acquired by the Bangladesh Navy are ageing and relatively unsophisticated. The Bangladesh Navy will not be

unrealistic about the actual capabilities that the Ming-class will provide. However, as these vassals make strategic calculations more complex for any naval power, to that extent their purchase represents value for money. The Bangladesh Navy may also use them for training and the foundation for something more ambitious at a time when funds permit.⁴⁰ The purchase of submarines may not immediately change the naval environment in a major way but it has definitely started the change.

This development will transform the Bangladesh Navy from a well-equipped coastal defence force into one that is also capable of exercising sea-denial and perhaps limited sea control over its EEZ and SLOCs. It appears that the Bangladesh Navy is signaling its intent of becoming a naval force to be reckoned with. The increasing Chinese influence would be of concern to regional players like India and also to the extra-regional players like the United States, who are also vying for influence as well as drilling rights in Bangladeshi waters. Going forward, it remains to be seen how Bangladesh will balance these players' often-conflicting interests.⁴¹

China helping Bangladesh Develop Military-Industrial Complex

Bangladesh at present largely depends on imports to meet its requirements of military hardware. This situation prevails because of the low capability of its defence industry. In this situation, as of now, there is little possibility of military exports. Its long-term objective however, like most military hardware importing nations, is to be self-reliant in them and if possible export them. To reduce dependency on imports the political leadership under Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina wants local defence companies, especially Bangladesh Machine Tools Factory (BMTF) and Bangladesh Ordnance Factories (BOF), to enhance their capability. She also wants the two companies to explore the possibility of export of defence equipment to other countries in the region.

To achieve defence export goals, Bangladesh, like several other Asian countries, is trying to commit foreign suppliers to engage with local industry to help develop capability. So far, the progress has

been slow because of the low level of existing capability and poor capacity to absorb incoming know-how. However, there are also some signs of development because of its arrangement with China under the 2002 defence agreement, which also talks of “enhancing co-operation in (defense industry) training, maintenance, and in some areas of production”. Two recent examples include China North Industries Corp (NORINCO) facilitating the Bangladesh Ordnance Factories (BOF)’s licensed production of Type 81 automatic assault rifles and the China Shipbuilding Industry Corporation supporting the Bangladesh Navy’s construction of five Padma-class patrol boats, the last of which was commissioned in 2014.⁴²

The cooperation between China and Bangladesh had started for the first time even before the liberation of Bangladesh, when in 1968, work began on the establishment of an ordnance factory. This factory was inaugurated on 6 April 1970. It was damaged during the liberation war but has been restored and expanded since then. Bangladesh Ordnance Factories (BOF) is the largest military-industrial complex of Bangladesh Army and is situated in Gazipur. It produces arms, ammunition, and equipment for the Bangladesh military. Though initial support came from China, subsequently, technology transfer was also available from Austria, Australia, Belgium, Germany and Italy. In 1982-83, BMR (Balancing, Modernisation, and Replacement) work started and was completed in 1987. After the BMR, the yearly production target of the factory was determined to be 2500 rifles and ammunition to the tune of 15 million per annum.⁴³ Gradually, BOF is positioning itself not only to attain self-reliance in manufacturing and supply of arms and ammunition to the Bangladesh armed forces, but also to join the export market.

China is helping the Bangladesh Navy in its transition to become a “builder’s navy” through the in-country construction of progressively more complex warships, corvettes, and frigates.⁴⁴ The Bangladesh Navy has commissioned five indigenously built Padma-class patrol craft by Khulna Shipyard Ltd. (KSY) through a collaboration overseen and supported by China’s state-owned enterprise China Shipbuilding Industry Corporation (CSIC). A transfer of technology

agreement was signed in May 2010 under which CSIC provided the design and material packages to Khulna Shipyard. To increase their attractiveness the Chinese shipbuilders, are now willing to offer not only low-cost options to cash-strapped nations but are also willing to transfer technology and shipbuilding expertise to customers who require it.⁴⁵ The success of this project has made Bangladesh's Khulna Shipyard Ltd start construction of the second batch of five Padma-class patrol vessels on order for the Bangladesh Navy.⁴⁶ Subsequently, the Bangladesh Navy commissioned two locally-built Chinese Durjoy-class large patrol craft (LPC), Durgam, and Nishan, along with two 32-m submarine handling tugs, at its Titumir naval base in Khulna on 8 November 2017.⁴⁷

The Bangladesh Air Force has now developed maintenance capability with China's help. In previous years technicians from China and the BAF used to collaborate on F-7 overhauls. The Bangladesh Air Force has now developed the capability to overhaul the F-7 fighter aircraft. This would provide cost savings and reduce dependencies on foreign contractors. The first aircraft was independently overhauled in September 2018. The overhaul programme also showed Bangladesh's efforts to develop local defence industrial capability through assistance provided by foreign suppliers.⁴⁸

In all these industrial programmes, China is Bangladesh's key partner highlighting the growing defence-industrial ties between Dhaka and Beijing.⁴⁹

Conclusion

The China-Bangladesh relationship is an example of politics between nations where pragmatism has taken precedence over history. Realising the importance of China, Bangladesh chose to ignore the adversarial role played by the country in its liberation war. Today, there is broad consensus among the major political players in Bangladesh to have a strategic relationship with China. Military and defence is a core component of this bilateral relationship resulting in the steady growth of Sino-Bangladesh defence cooperation.

Today Bangladesh is a major importer of Chinese arms. Bangladesh also serves Chinese interests by being an important market for its defence exports. But this relationship cannot be fully understood by the simple demand-supply logic. This relationship is part of China's defense diplomacy with the South Asian nations where the avowed policy of Beijing is to undermine India's position. But what is far more important is the role of Bangladesh as part of BCIM-EC in the Belt and Road Initiative. China as an emerging global and maritime power wants to collaborate with countries that can play an important role in its maritime ventures.

The supply of two outdated submarines to Bangladesh is with the objective to alter the regional balance of power in the Bay of Bengal. It is also part of the larger Chinese policy to penetrate the Indian Ocean and overcome its Malacca Dilemma. Bangladesh has no problem with the presence of navies of other world powers. It thinks that the presence of outside navies will only check the ambition of regional navies especially India, which it considers a threat.

Bangladesh believes that its economic prospect depends heavily on sea-based trade. It is also interested in exploiting hydrocarbon resources from its newly-acquired maritime area. The modernisation of the Bangladesh Navy is largely driven by its need to protect the SLOCs and resource-rich EEZ. The interests of China and Bangladesh now converge in the Indian Ocean region. Bangladesh would not be perturbed if it also leads to a shift in the strategic balance.

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4. New Strategic Calculations Boost Bangladesh-Russia Defence Relations

The Soviet Union was the strongest supporter of East Pakistan in its liberation war, after India. Its support in the UN expedited the birth of Bangladesh as a new sovereign nation. Even after the emergence of Bangladesh as an independent country, the Soviet Union helped it in political, economic, and military spheres. This relationship went into hibernation after the coup in August 1975. Russia is the successor to the erstwhile Soviet Union. Bangladesh, after the restoration of democracy in the country in 1990, has been trying to revive its relationship with Russia. Since then, in the area of military hardware, Russia has supplied armoured personnel carriers, transport helicopters, and trainer/combat aircraft. This relationship is now interestingly poised as both Russia and Bangladesh are looking for new possibilities and opportunities.

Strong Soviet Support during the Liberation War

The Soviet Union gave invaluable support to the liberation of East Pakistan. Nikolai Podgorny was the first Head of State to express concern when Pakistani soldiers were committing atrocities and genocide on Bengali people in early April 1971. He called for a political resolution of the issue. The Soviets agreed that it was the refugee issue that had brought India into the crisis. This was conveyed to the then Indian foreign minister, Swaran Singh when he visited Moscow on 8 June 1971. The Soviets decided to turn against Pakistan after Z.A. Bhutto led a military mission to Beijing and

courted China publicly. When the hostilities broke out in December 1971, Leonid Brezhnev was of the view that the conflict was caused by bloody suppression.

During the liberation war, Moscow extended her full support to East Pakistan in the international arena. It vetoed Western draft Resolutions which had called for a ceasefire without referring to the need for a political resolution of the issue, thrice to block them. Russia stationed a large number of troops on her borders with China to discourage the latter from militarily intervening in the Bangladesh war. When President Richard Nixon decided to send their Seventh Fleet to the Bay of Bengal ostensibly to rescue their war-stranded expatriates, Moscow quickly sent her fleet to the same area. Pakistani troops surrendered on 16 December 1971.

Relationship in the Post-liberation Period

Period of Bonhomie

The Soviet Union was seen as a major adversary in united Pakistan but its status changed completely after the liberation of East Pakistan and the creation of Bangladesh, where it was seen as a great friend. On 25 January 1972, the Soviet Union and Bangladesh exchanged notes on establishing diplomatic relations. Later, the Soviet Union also assisted Bangladesh in its membership of the UN.

The Soviet Union was the second country to be visited by Mujib after liberation. During the visit, Mujib and Kosygin signed a joint declaration in Moscow on 5 March 1972. In 1972, a completely war- devastated Bangladesh needed huge international assistance to reconstruct her economy, emergency food assistance to feed the millions, and to rehabilitate millions of refugees. The Soviet Union offered considerable help.

The Soviet Union helped revive Chittagong Port which was the lifeline of Bangladesh's external trade. During the liberation war, Pakistani forces had planted mines at the Chittagong Port, as a result of which a number of ships and vessels were sunk. To make the Port reusable it was necessary to clear the mines and remove sunken ships. Mujib had approached the UN in this regard but could not get

the required assistance. Mujib subsequently approached the Soviet leadership when assistance from other sources was unavailable. The Soviet Union responded to the request and sent their naval personnel to clear mines and to reactivate the Port.

The first Soviet minesweeper entered the port of Chittagong on 26 April 1972. The work on minesweeping and the raising of sunken ships was concluded in 26 months. Soviets remained in Chittagong from 1972 to 1974. During the operation, a senior sailor, Yuri V. Redkin lost his life as a hero. His grave is situated on the premises of Bangladesh Military Navy Academy.¹

The Soviets had undertaken the task of reviving Chittagong Port after the UN's refusal. Still, a section in Bangladesh was critical of the government's decision to engage the Soviets. They alleged that the Soviets were looking for a military base. This allegation was refuted by the foreign minister Abdus Samad Azad, in August 1972 as mischievous propaganda. He asserted that the Bangladesh Government would never allow any foreign base to be established within the country. He also pointed out Dhaka's policy to retain the Indian Ocean and the Bay of Bengal area as a region of peace, free from rivalry among big powers and foreign military bases. Still, critics objected to the very presence of the Soviets.

The Soviets also tried to help Bangladesh rebuild its war-ravaged economy. They helped to build various thermal power plants, met initial defence needs, provided logistic support to dispatch emergency assistance, and offered a large number of scholarships to students to study in various Soviet universities. Under a barter trade arrangement, they imported primary products like jute, tea, leather, etc. and in return, exported various industrial goods and minerals.²

The defence relationship between the Soviet Union and Bangladesh also began during this period. The first weapon supply to Bangladesh came from the Soviet Union, after Mujib had signed a deal with the Soviets. The Soviets gave them the latest version MIG 21s. They also gave them transport aircraft, radars, and MI 8 helicopters with negligible payment. For the first ten years, Bangladesh was not supposed to pay anything. Then for the next ten years payment was to be made in Bangladeshi Taka. Bangladesh

also got MI 8 helicopters as a donation for its Air Force. Today, Bangladeshi helicopters are mostly Russian-made. The MI series is so reliable that most Western countries are also using them. These helicopters are extensively used in the mining and oil and gas producing sectors. China also purchases these helicopters from Russia.³

Period of Rapid Decline

After the murder of Mujib in August 1975, Khandakar Mushtaq Ahmed became the new president of Bangladesh. He was West-leaning and keen to cultivate China. In November 1975, Major General Ziaur Rahman emerged as the strongman under the formal presidency of Justice Sayem. Now there was a rapid decline of the Soviet influence. Soviets were not happy with the increasing rapport between Dhaka and Beijing.

The autocratic military regimes that came to power in Bangladesh, abruptly suspended ongoing bilateral cooperation with Moscow, to get recognition of their regimes by the Western powers in the then Cold War era. The bilateral relations reached their lowest ebb when Bangladesh expelled a large number of Russian diplomats from Dhaka.

To improve the relationship, the Sayem-Zia government sent special envoy Tabarek Hossain to Moscow in December 1975, who was successful in damage control. During this period, Bangladesh became a close friend of China but avoided any major dispute with the Soviet Union. However, it criticised Soviet action in Afghanistan in late 1979 and early 1980 and called for immediate withdrawal.

From the time of Ziaur Rahman, China replaced the Soviet Union as a major supplier of weapons for Bangladesh. When Ziaur Rahman visited China in 1980 as Bangladesh president, he signed an umbrella agreement. This agreement was signed to ensure military supply from China and defence became a key component in the bilateral relationship.⁴ Since then, conducting major military purchases from China was the informal protocol in Bangladesh. China has also created an impression in Bangladesh that it supplies military hardware at low prices and on good financial terms.

Some senior military officers of Bangladesh believe that the decision of the country to go to China to source its weapons after the assassination of Mujib was a retrograde step.⁵ The Chinese F-6 was a copied version of Russian MiG-19, which was of 1952 vintage. Russia had stopped using them as they were the first supersonic planes and had many engineering defects. Bangladesh paid a heavy price by risking the lives of its pilots. For the Chinese aircraft, the initial price may be very low but the cost of spare parts is very high. The shelf-life of these planes is also short. So their ownership cost tends to be much higher. Air Force officers in Bangladesh also believe that they share a good working relationship with Russia. The Bangladesh Air Force has also developed a good supply line and maintenance system with Russia.

Sourcing from Russia to Diversify Arms Purchases

From 1996 to 2002, the Sheikh Hasina-led Awami League government was in power in Bangladesh. During this period, it tried to diversify the sources of arms procurement. It purchased eight MiG-29 Fulcrum jet fighters in a US\$ 124 million state-to-state deal between Dhaka and Moscow in 1999. Each aircraft cost Bangladesh US\$ 11 million. The remaining US\$ 36 million was allocated for training and spare parts. About 10 pilots and 70 technicians underwent training in Russia as part of the deal to familiarise themselves with the aircraft.

Besides this, the government signed another frigate purchase deal worth US\$ 93 million with South Korea's Daewoo Shipyard. Both these deals turned out to be controversial. It was alleged that the Daewoo Shipyard was given the order despite having no experience in building frigates even when an experienced Chinese shipbuilder was willing to supply it for US\$ 78 million. However, when this frigate was commissioned at Chittagong Naval Base by Sheikh Hasina it was the most modern ship in the Bangladeshi fleet.⁶

Similarly, the Chinese government had offered to sell twelve F-7 MB fighters to Bangladesh on deferred payment, but the offer was not accepted. It was alleged that the Bangladesh government opted for MiG despite Chinese planes being relatively cheap. It was also

argued that the pilots and technicians of the Bangladesh Air Force were familiar with these machines as they were already flying them.

In the past, during the regime of military dictator Ziaur Rahman, it was a given for Bangladesh to purchase all military hardware from China. It was perhaps unthinkable for the BNP that Bangladesh could ever buy any major military hardware from any other source other than China.

An allegation of corruption was levelled against Sheikh Hasina by the BNP-led government, in the procurement of the jet fighters. They cited the report of one of the security agencies of Bangladesh which had suggested that the purchase of the MiGs would exhaust the maintenance budget of the Air Force. The report had also claimed that the deal would affect the maintenance of the existing five squadrons, each having 16 jets, due to paucity of funds. Subsequently, Sheikh Hasina and some officials of her government were charged for alleged irregularities in the purchase of the MiGs. The government was also accused of “willful wrongdoing” in the purchase of the military equipment from Russia.

Khaleda Zia government claimed that most of the eight MiGs were grounded and were a burden on the national exchequer. She even suggested that her government would sell them if a buyer was found as the Air Force was unable to meet their maintenance cost. Sheikh Hasina on the other hand, dismissed these allegations and argued that the MiGs were purchased at a competitive price for the defence of the country. Interestingly, even the United States made serious attempts to prevent the Sheikh Hasina government from purchasing the Russian MiGs though they were themselves unable to offer Dhaka any comparable fighter jet aircraft at a competitive price.⁷ It's obvious, more than the price and corruption, geo-politics was also involved.

Defence and Economic Relationship Gains Momentum

Real progress in relations with Russia was made after Sheikh Hasina came back to power in 2009. She visited St. Petersburg in 2010 to attend an international meeting for the preservation of the tiger. She utilised this visit to meet President Putin and other Russian leaders to

establish a platform for the resumption of bilateral cooperation. To consolidate the progress made, Hasina once again visited Moscow in January 2013. This was just the second trip by a Bangladesh Prime Minister to the Russian Federation, after Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, who had visited the country, then the Soviet Union, in March 1972 at the invitation of Leonid Brezhnev.⁸ Hasina signed three important agreements during the visit.

The first agreement was to revive and expand a nuclear power plant in Rooppur with the capacity to generate 2,000 (instead of earlier 200) MWs of power. Bangladesh needs this plant to meet its growing energy requirements. It has few available energy sources and nuclear power could be a viable alternative. Russia agreed to give a loan worth US\$ 500 million to Bangladesh for the construction of this plant.⁹

The second agreement was to seek Russian help in the exploration of gas in the mainland. Russia agreed to invest US\$ 193 million in a joint project undertaken by Russia's gas giant Gazprom and Bangladesh's Petrobangla Corporation. The project envisages drilling of ten gas wells in Bangladesh. According to Russian President Putin, the project will make it possible to raise gas production in Bangladesh to 56 million cubic metres a day.¹⁰

Finally, Bangladesh also signed a US\$ 1 billion arms purchase deal with the Russians. Russian President Vladimir Putin said that his country would issue loans worth US\$ 1 billion to buy Russian weapons and military hardware.¹¹ The arms being purchased from Russia are defensive. Some of these arms are needed to meet the requirements of Bangladeshi troops stationed under various UN Peacekeeping Operations. The Bangladesh government plans to meet most of the cost of these weapons through rental reimbursements from the UN. Moreover, these arms will also help the Bangladesh Navy to protect the maritime areas which they have secured after the ITLOS verdicts.

Bangladesh's Motivation behind Buying Arms from Russia

Though the main reason behind Bangladesh sourcing its arms from Russia is to diversify its arms procurement sources, there are

some other reasons as well. For instance, Bangladesh could have easily bought some of the weapons it uses in the UN peacekeeping operations from Western sources but it chose to buy them from Russia because not many countries there were interested in first giving loans and then supplying weapons.¹²

Russia is also considered as a place to source weapons because that country was the primary supplier of arms to Bangladesh before August 1975. Subsequently, while China emerged as a major supplier of arms to Bangladesh, the arms supplied by the Chinese were designed on Russian models. Moreover, China itself remains one of the largest buyers of Russian arms.

Bangladesh also has economic motives. It hopes that this re-establishment of ties will allow it to gain access to the Russian market for its export products like ready-made garments. At present, most of these products are exported to the US and the EU.

The purchase of Russian weapons in such large quantity was seen as a major departure from the established policy of buying arms from China. Critics of the deal started picking holes in the nuclear deal. It was pointed out that Russia is the country where Chernobyl happened. It was also suggested that when countries like France were offering their reactors why did Bangladesh choose Russia? Some also criticised Russia for linking the arms deal with the nuclear reactor. However, some others also pointed out that Russia was chosen because it was willing to dispose the nuclear waste.¹³

Russian Motivation behind Selling Arms to Bangladesh

Russia also has its own motivation behind selling arms to Bangladesh. Russia's traditional arms market is shrinking. India, a major buyer of Russian weapons, has been diversifying its sources. The Russian market in North Africa is contracting. Syria is in trouble and Iraq is no more a buyer. Some African countries are also now importing from the West. As a result, Russia is looking elsewhere for customers to sustain its arms exports and domestic defence industrial sector.

This consideration has forced the Russian state to lend to poor states so that they can buy Russian-made weapons.¹⁴ This policy was followed by the Soviet Union, but later given up as huge debts

could not be repaid. Russia resumed this policy in 2005 by lending money to Syria to buy weapons. Once again, it landed up in trouble as Syria descended into chaos. That is why in the case of Bangladesh now it is charging a little higher interest rate.

Russia is looking at Bangladesh as an important market for arms exports. Bangladesh was offered the advanced MiG-35 in April 2017 even before it was offered to India. This offer was made to Bangladesh right after the Hasina-Modi summit meeting on 7 April 2017.¹⁵ In that summit, it was announced that the Indian government would extend a special US\$ 500 million line of credit to Bangladesh so that it can strengthen its armed forces. The Russians perhaps thought that Bangladesh might use this line of credit to get advanced fighter planes for its armed forces. Russia is also supplying weapons to Afghanistan under a similar tripartite agreement where funding is provided by India.

The BNP immediately protested over the issue and alleged that the Indian line of credit would be used to pay for obsolete arms and weapons. The BNP leaders suggested that Bangladesh should not buy old Russian warplanes and alleged that India's motives were "suspect".¹⁶ However, there was little substance in the BNP's allegations. These planes had already been bought by Egypt under a US\$ 2.5 billion deal with Russia, and the cost of each plane was around US\$ 46 million. Countries like the UAE and Kazakhstan were also showing interest in buying them. Moreover, Nizhni Novgorod, Russia's MiG-producing unit had already sold 11,000 planes abroad out of an aggregate of 45,000 planes in 2016. This further weakened the allegation of obsolescence by the BNP.

Many in Bangladesh also saw this as competition between India and China, where China enjoys a big lead in the sale of arms and project implementation. The strong lobby in Bangladesh supported by the BNP wanted all major arms procurement to be done from China. Perhaps the BNP was trying to pre-empt any government attempt to buy Russian warplanes using Indian money.

Interestingly, the BNP does not raise similar issues in deals with China. In June 2018, a contract was signed in Dhaka between Bangladesh and China whereby China was to deliver 23 units of

the Hongdu K-8W intermediate training jets to the Bangladesh Air Force (BAF). The BAF did not disclose the total amount of the deal, but it was believed that its value was more than US\$ 200 million. This deal marked the second phase of Bangladesh's K-8W fleet. Bangladesh has been using this aircraft since September 2014, when the first batch of four units of K-8Ws was inducted into the service. That deal was controversial as the Bangladesh Air Force, instead of developing a good fighter inventory, was investing too much money on training aircraft. At that time it had fewer than 45 fighter jets but was possessing 51 jet training aircraft. The new fleet of K-8Ws was going to increase the number of trainers further. Interestingly, the BNP did not find any problem with this deal.¹⁷

Strategic Calculations of Russia and Bangladesh

Both Russia and Bangladesh now have their own strategic calculations for which they want to improve their bilateral relations.

Russian Attempt to Project Power in an Increasingly Bipolar World

A new bipolarity seems to be emerging in international politics where China is increasingly challenging the supremacy of the US. However, in this environment, Russia has been carefully projecting its power in different regions around the world including South Asia.¹⁸ Russia's troubled relations with the West had forced it to look towards China. However, recently Russia tried to register its presence in South Asia as an independent actor when it took a stand on Kashmir different from China and called abrogation of Article 370 as India's internal affair.

Russia is also trying to retrieve its lost ground in South Asia. South Asia has aroused the interests of major powers since 1947. The region is at present witnessing jostling for influence between the US and China. The US is however distracted by issues like North Korea and Iran and its policy lacks coherence. The US policy became further unpredictable under President Trump. In this situation, the presence of Russia in South Asia makes it truly multipolar. Over the years, Russia has become a power of consequence in West Asia

and Africa while in South Asia it is trying to retrieve lost ground. Russia now wants to increase its influence in some other South Asian countries as well. After India, Bangladesh offers the second-best option. Similarly, it will also be useful for Bangladesh to partner with a major power to enhance its security and bargaining capability for the attainment of its regional and international foreign policy goals.¹⁹ Given the US' selective and temporary nature of friendship and China's hands-off attitude over the Rohingya issue, Russia could prove to be a useful option in Bangladesh's geopolitical calculation.

South Asia is an important region where there is a huge demand for arms because of the rivalry between India and Pakistan. India also has a troubled relationship with China. This makes this region a significant arms market for Russia. China and India are the most important customers of Moscow's armaments industry. In recent times, another important arms market has emerged in Bangladesh. Bangladesh, because of its rapid economic growth and increasing participation in the UN peacekeeping operations, is able to spend more on arms. Bangladesh can import sophisticated military hardware from Russia at a concessional rate.

Benefits for Bangladesh

Bangladesh's defence partnership with Russia could also bring benefits in other areas. Bangladesh could benefit in the energy sector which happens to be the main source of Russia's foreign exchange earnings. Bangladesh can import energy, particularly oil and gas, from the Russian Federation.

For energy-deficient Bangladesh, cooperation with Russia in the energy sector is a focal point of bilateral cooperation. Russia and Bangladesh have been cooperating in the energy sector since the 1970s. In Bangladesh 20 per cent of the electricity is still produced by the power plants in Ghorasal and Siddhirganj which were constructed with Soviet assistance. It is also using Russian corporations to explore oil and gas in Bangladesh. Presently, Russian energy giants like Rosatom and Gazprom EP International are actively contributing to the realisation of the "Universal Electrification-2021" plan of the Government of Bangladesh. Russia

is now constructing the first nuclear power plant in Bangladesh at Rooppur in Pabna district. It will help the country to attain energy security by developing its power sector. The project is also aimed at stabilising electricity prices and reducing Bangladesh's dependence on high-cost power generation based on imported fuel.²⁰

Robust economic growth in Russia has also turned it into a market. Bangladesh wants to explore this market for further expansion of exports of tea, jute, jute manufactures, footwear, pharmaceuticals, and melamine. In 2016 the bilateral trade volume exceeded US\$ 1.4 billion. More than 90 per cent of Bangladesh's exports to Russia consists of ready-made garments, seafood, and leather items. Bangladesh could also export skilled manpower to Russia, which has a declining population.

Russia follows a typical model to improve its ties with potential partners. It expands economic ties based on energy and, often, arms deals. Those enhanced business and trade ties then generally lead to increased Russian political influence. This process has been observed in many states.²¹ The deal which Russia signed with Bangladesh in 2013 replicates this model. However, Bangladesh would like to manage its partnership with Russia carefully so that it does not jeopardise bilateral relations with China or the United States in a big way.

Concluding Remarks

Military and defence relations between countries is rarely a standalone in a bilateral relationship. It is often linked to the political, economic, and strategic relationship between the partner countries. This is also seen in the case of Russia and Bangladesh. The Soviet Union was the first country to offer military, economic and political support to the nascent state of Bangladesh. However, the relationship took a rapid nosedive after the assassination of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

The people who came to power in Bangladesh after Mujib had a completely different strategic vision. They started viewing both India and the Soviet Union which supported their liberation war, as their enemies. They were more interested in getting recognition for their regimes from the West and China. Their objectives were also

reflected in the policies they followed. Ziaur Rahman went to China and signed a comprehensive agreement of which military supplies were an important part and for decades, it was not out-of-place for Bangladesh to import most of its military hardware from China. Any deviation from this policy is strongly criticised by the BNP and its ideologues. Perhaps this section believes that China is a benefactor of Bangladesh and is helping it to deal with India robustly. However, this belief is turning out to be completely misplaced as China has its own global power ambitions. Bangladesh has now become just a pawn for it to be used on the global chessboard. This became amply clear when China moved away from Bangladesh on the Rohingya issue and supported Myanmar.

Sheikh Hasina wisely does not want to put all eggs in one basket and is looking to diversify relationships. Her government is trying to revive the old partnership with Russia. Even her detractors in the Bangladesh Army know that the military hardware provided by China is often a poor copy of the Russian equipment. It's hardly surprising that she wants to source good quality military hardware and fighter planes from Russia. If Russia is looking for new markets to export its weapons, Bangladesh is also looking for new markets where it can sell commodities that it exports. Bangladesh also hopes that the relationship with Russia will help it in the energy sector where the country has a growing demand. It's possible that in the future we may see a deepening relationship between these two countries.

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5. Changing Strategic Configuration and Bangladesh-US Defence Relationship

Bangladesh faced an uneasy relationship with the US in the immediate aftermath of its liberation, as the US was an ally of Pakistan. However, soon things started changing as the reality dawned on both sides. This made the US-Bangladesh relationship move on a different trajectory than that which could have been predicted on the basis of the role played by various actors during the conflict in 1971. Presently, both countries enjoy a healthy relationship. Their defence relationship increased considerably after Bangladesh participated in the Gulf War as an ally in the US-led multinational front. Now Bangladesh participates in joint exercises with the US military. Its officers are trained in the United States. It also makes defence purchases from the US Department of Defense as well as commercial sources. Bangladesh's contribution in UN peacekeeping operations around the world was appreciated by US President Bill Clinton. After the emergence of China as a major power in the Indo-Pacific, the United States has begun focusing on the Bay of Bengal. This has also meant greater attention to Bangladesh in its foreign and security policy. Interestingly, Bangladesh, which looked for a closer defence relationship with the US soon after liberation, now finds it difficult to go all the way with that country in the area of defence partnership, because, in the meantime, China has emerged as its major defence partner.

Background of the US-Bangladesh Relationship

From 1947 to 1971, Bangladesh was part of Pakistan and was known as East Pakistan. The end of the Second World War saw major changes in the global power structure. The significance of Britain was considerably reduced. In its place, the US became a superpower with its atomic power. The US wanted Britain to maintain order in its former colonies and did not consider South Asia important for its strategic interests. In 1949, the State-Army-Navy-Air Force Coordination Committee (SANACC) placed the region in priority number 4, which meant limited assistance to the region.

US Tilt towards Pakistan

However, in 1950, the detonation of the atomic bomb by the Soviet Union, the emergence of the Communist regime in China, and the outbreak of the Korean War changed the whole scenario and suddenly Pakistan's location became strategic to handle these new emerging challenges.

India's non-alignment policy, its stand on the Korean War, and its refusal to sign the San Francisco Treaty further tilted the US towards Pakistan. In 1952, John Foster Dulles, the new US Secretary of State considered military aid to Pakistan to build a "northern tier of countries" against the Soviet Union. On 19 May 1954, the US and Pakistan signed the "Mutual Defense Agreement". Pakistan received sizeable military aid under this Agreement, which upset the balance in South Asia and brought the Cold War to the region. The US continued military aid to Pakistan fearing that its stoppage might force Pakistan to shift from its anti-communist pro-West policy.

The Americans at the same time also wanted to prevent India from falling under communist influence. They were aware of the presence of other superpowers in the region and salvage work at Chittagong Port. This prompted them to urge both India and Pakistan to evolve a Common Defense Program, which unfortunately, did not work out.

In the early 1960s, the situation changed somewhat when John F. Kennedy became president. He had been critical of the American military alliance with Pakistan. Americans also hoped that the 1962

war between India and China would make India give up its policy of non-alignment and seek US military assistance.

However, a further twist in the situation came in 1963 with the emergence of a close relationship between Pakistan and China. The India-Pakistan war in 1965 turned out to be another turning point in the US' South Asia policy. The US was providing aid to both India and Pakistan for economic development, political stability, and to contain communism. Instead, American assistance – especially military assistance – was used against each other. As a result, the Americans reduced arms shipments to both sides. This also led to a rethink and reconstitution of American interests and policies in the region. Lyndon Johnson felt that the US' strategic interests in the region were greatly exaggerated. In April 1967, the US announced a new arms policy to limit arms acquisition by both countries and give higher priority to economic development. Now the US' military ally, Pakistan, started disengaging from the military pacts CENTO and CEATO. It also closed the American military base at Badabar.

In the Liberation war in East Pakistan in 1971, the US supported Pakistan and even sent the Seventh Fleet to the Bay of Bengal. However, it provided humanitarian aid to the refugees through the UN agencies. There were several reasons behind this American stance. They feared that Pakistan's breakup would tilt the regional power balance in favour of India. East Pakistan leaders were opposed to any military alliances like CENTO and SEATO. Americans thought that an emerging Bangladesh might withdraw from the American alliances and there was also a chance that Yahya Khan might succeed in quelling the liberation movement. Moreover, a democratic government was not likely to serve the American interests in South Asia. There were also some globally relevant reasons. Henry Kissinger saw a sinister Soviet design in breaking up the American alliance system. After all, Pakistan was an American ally. Americans also wanted to use Pakistan to get closer to China so that they could take advantage of the Sino-Soviet border dispute. The strong personal predilections of Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger also made Americans support Pakistan.

Post-Liberation, Bangladesh and US Adopt Pragmatic Approach

In the immediate aftermath of the Liberation war, Bangladesh was close to India and the USSR, while US influence was excluded. However, soon reality prevailed on both sides, leading to the recognition of newly-emerged Bangladesh by the United States on 4 April 1972. The US soon opted for a more positive policy to reduce the influence of India and the USSR and bring Bangladesh closer to it. The Bangladesh-US defence relationship developed with this backdrop.

US-Bangladesh relations could take off for several reasons. Pakistan's Prime Minister Suhrawardy (1956-57) who was from East Pakistan had justified the Western Alliance. He had suggested that Pakistan's friendship with Muslim countries alone would not sufficiently offset India's power. Mujib was a disciple of Suhrawardy. Mujib's policies were only marginally different. Though at the government-to-government level, the US had supported Pakistan, there were strong voices of dissent within the country. A large section of the American body politic did not support the view of the administration. This was seen in the media, the legislature, and on the university campuses. There were some opposing voices in the American bureaucracy too. Prominent among them were Kenneth Keating, US Ambassador in India, and Archer Blood, posted as Consul General in Dhaka.

This dissent in various sections of the American body politic moderated the extent of the US tilt and also moderated the anti-Americanism of the Bangladeshi leadership. This kept alive the possibility of future improvement in the US-Bangladesh relationship. Mujib was initially bitter with the US but subsequently, the Awami League leadership took the line that there was a perceived distinction between the American government and people.

Moreover, Bangladesh was heavily dependent on US economic assistance. It realised that the US can play a role in the rebuilding of a shattered economy. In these circumstances, Bangladesh followed the policy of a balanced relationship with all major powers. The US was also keen to mend fences with Bangladesh; it was aware that

long indifference or hostility towards Bangladesh would put it in the lap of the Soviet Union and increase the influence of India. The US continued to pump aid in Bangladesh and also tried to use its economic leverage to attain political ends. For instance, in 1974, the US wanted Bangladesh to stop exporting jute to Cuba before a food agreement could be signed.

The US continued to retain its Consulate General in Dhaka despite the absence of formal relations. Washington now stopped looking at Pakistan as a counterweight to India and wanted a smooth relationship with Bangladesh unaffected by differences in the Bangladesh-Pakistan relationship.

Things further improved for the US in August 1975 when in a coup Mujib was killed and replaced by Khandakar Mushtaq Ahmed with whom the US had already established a relationship when he was Foreign Minister of Bangladesh's government in exile. There was considerable deterioration in the India-Bangladesh's relationship after the coup in August 1975. The people who assumed power after the coup presented those countries who supported the liberation as a threat rather than those who opposed it. Even before the coup, in 1974, a conflict had arisen with India when the Government of Bangladesh had signed production-sharing contracts with six foreign oil companies granting them extraction rights. Thus the bilateral relationship had already started deteriorating even before the coup of 1975.

Ideally, Bangladesh would have liked to use the support of a superpower against India but unfortunately for them, none of the superpowers had any major strategic interests in the country. The Carter administration also gave low priority to South Asia. Besides, Bangladesh was located on non-essential backwater of the Indian Ocean and had no deep water port. It is also located much too far from the strategic Indian Ocean sea lanes to be of any great importance. Ironically, a politically stable Bangladesh was also not of much interest to the US, but whenever there was political instability in the country it was a cause for concern. The US did not want extreme deterioration in India Bangladesh relations which could have brought in its wake the involvement of major powers.

The policy makers in Bangladesh thought that any political support from the US could be used as leverage against possible threats from India. Bangladesh also did not like India's policy that sought to exclude involvement of outside powers in South Asia. Bangladesh needed the US to deter India but for the US the only significant interest was to prevent the country from coming under the influence of communism. To achieve that objective, the US wanted to provide effective support to Bangladesh so that it can have a healthy economy and a stable polity.

Dhaka could not play one superpower against another as the global *détente* emerged in the post-liberation period, leading to considerable erosion in its power. Bangladesh tried to keep a relationship with the US which at least did not make it hostile. This situation is likely to continue unless there is a 'radical' shift in the political ideology of the government.

Bangladesh also wanted the US to first draw up and articulate a specific South Asian policy. It wanted to clearly understand the US' security needs in the region. There was a feeling that the US-Pakistan military alliance failed because there was no reciprocity in the relationship. There was also suspicion about the reliability of the US in helping its allies in times of crisis.

Bangladesh remains a major recipient of US aid. After the liberation of the country, Bangladesh started to move away from the Soviet Union but was careful enough not to annoy any major superpower. This shift became easier since 1975 as the new governments were not restricted by the same degree of gratitude towards the Soviet Union. Moreover, the Soviet Union was unable to provide the economic assistance required by the new war-ravaged country. Bangladesh decided that the socialist goals would be achieved through a Western parliamentary system. It agreed to the formation of an aid club under World Bank auspices and showed a willingness to seek help from non-Socialist countries. However, its dependence on external aid, in general, has diminished in recent years, as the country's economy continues to do well.

There is a deep American cultural influence on the Bangladeshi elites. Most senior officials have been trained in the US and a large

section of the academics have been to the American universities. Political leaders and journalists often travel to Western countries. The elite have broad cultural if not ideological sympathy with the general American ethos leaving a positive impact on bilateral relations. The cultural linkages of the elites also drew the country towards the West. This also ensured that America did not become a scapegoat in any Bangladeshi domestic political issue. There is no mindless anti-American feeling in Bangladesh despite its adversarial role during the liberation war.

Presently, there are no intractable problems or irritants in US-Bangladesh relations and the bilateral relationship has undergone a qualitative transformation from one of donor-recipient to partners-in-progress. The growth of the Bangladesh economy has made the country less dependent on foreign assistance. Still, America and other Western nations remain a major export destination for the main Bangladeshi export of ready-made garments and leather products.

Meanwhile, the strategic configuration of the subcontinent has changed further after the US started moving closer to both Bangladesh and India. In the new millennium, threats of the old era like the spread of communism are no longer present. In its place, China has emerged as a new challenger to the US predominance in the world. This is affecting geopolitics in many regions including South Asia.

Development of Military Relations with the United States

As Bangladesh was a low-priority region for the United States, the relationship between their militaries was slow to develop. However, since 1982, a liaison team comprising the Pacific Command of the US and the Bangladesh military has been in operation to coordinate their actions in the Indian Ocean Zone, including in times of disasters, breach of peace or hostility in the region.¹ Hundreds of military personnel from Bangladesh have received training in the US since 1979 and US military assistance to Bangladesh has been fairly steady since the 1980s.

US Quest for Military Base

The US was interested in having a military base in Bangladesh even before its liberation. The proposal was made for the first time by Joseph Farland, the then American envoy to Pakistan in 1969 when he met Mujib and Maulana Bhasani after Yahya Khan came to power replacing Ayub Khan. The American Ambassador promised them political and material support if they started a separatist movement. In return, the Bangladeshi leaders would have to hand over St. Martin Island, including Manpura to the United States. The proposal was not accepted by Bhasani and Mujib, as they feared India's opposition. The proposal was repeated once again by Farland to Mujib during a closed-door meeting on 21 March 1971, but Mujib during that period was busy negotiating the political future of East Pakistan.

Soon after the liberation of East Pakistan into Bangladesh, the US wanted to develop close defence relationships with the country because it was apprehensive that Bangladesh could handover Chittagong Port to the USSR to establish a military base. When American Secretary of State, Henry A. Kissinger visited the subcontinent in 1974 after the liberation of Bangladesh, he once again repeated the offer. He promised to help Mujib in handling the economy of Bangladesh, which was facing problems from famine as well as devastating floods in return for a secret transfer of the control of St. Martin Island. Mujib however did not agree.

In the early 1980s, a Soviet military analyst suggested that the United States wanted to establish a series of military bases in the Indian Ocean. It wanted to use two Bangladeshi islands (one of them being Manpura), a former British naval base at Trincomalee in Sri Lanka as well as the South African naval base near Simonstown, to surround the eastern part of Africa, South West Asia, and South Asia.

In early 1984, Lieutenant General James M. Lee, Commander of the US land forces in the Western Pacific, visited Bangladesh. During this visit, he held extensive discussions with the then president and Chief Martial Law Administrator Lt. Gen. H.M. Ershad, the Chief of the Bangladesh Navy and Air Force, the Chief of General Staff

and the Defence Secretary. He was interested in obtaining landing facilities for the aircraft of the Seventh Fleet during emergencies as the largest port of Bangladesh, Chittagong, was not considered suitable for berthing for big warships. However, emergency landing facilities including refueling amenities in the Bay of Bengal could have been of tremendous advantage for its aircraft.

In the same year, three senior military officers of the Asia-Pacific Command undertook an extensive tour not only of Chittagong but also of the St. Martin and Manpura Islands. Apparently, while the US was looking for emergency landing facilities for the Seventh Fleet aircraft at Chittagong, it wanted to establish naval bases in the two islands. The strong domestic opposition did not allow the Bangladesh government to permit the US to establish naval bases in these islands.

In January 1986, Lieutenant General Charles Wilson Bagral, Commander of the United States Army's Western Command, visited Bangladesh followed by the visit of Admiral Ronald J. Hays, Commander-in-Chief of the US Pacific Command in December 1986. These military officials during their visit met the Bangladesh president and high-ranking military officials. In December 1986, the US ship *Capandamo* paid a goodwill visit to Chittagong Port. These visits once again gave rise to the speculation about the US seeking a naval base at St. Martin's Island, especially as uncertainty grew about the renewal of the US bases in the Philippines. The US denied this allegation and stated that it had no such intention.

The changing geopolitical scene in the 1980s reduced the American desire for a military base in Bangladesh. The growing Sino-American rapprochement meant that Chinese containment was no longer felt necessary. It was also pointed out to the Americans that a US base on Bangladeshi soil would not be welcomed by its population. Its people have traditionally opposed military alliances in favour of non-alignment. In any case, the American base at Diego Garcia made any other base redundant.

US Proposal of SOFA with Bangladesh

As the US could not get a military base in Bangladesh, it proposed the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) to the country. It was

interested in such an agreement for several reasons. The nuclear tests by India and Pakistan changed the security situation in the sub-continent and South Asia no longer remained a low-priority region for the US administration.² The nuclear tests invited US sanctions and considerably worsened relations between the sub-continental neighbours and strained Sino-Indian relations. Military analysts also believed that since the withdrawal of US forces from the Clark and Subic Bay bases in the Philippines, Bangladesh would have served as a “half-way house” for US forces in the region. Moreover, the US economic interest in Bangladesh was also increasing, especially in oil and gas exploration.

The US also approached Sri Lanka for military facilities but Colombo did not respond favourably keeping in view India’s concerns. The Americans, meanwhile, planned to base a full-fledged Fifth Fleet in Manama and Bahrain, in place of a few units of the US Navy’s Central Command.

SOFA was proposed for the first time by the US diplomat Bill Richardson, when he visited Bangladesh in early 1998.³ The issue was once again discussed when the Chief of Staff of US Army, Gen. Dennis Reimer visited the country in April 1998, heading a 97-member goodwill delegation. The issue of SOFA ignited a debate in the country and different stakeholders took different stands depending on their threat perception and ideological orientation.

Initially, it was felt that the Sheikh Hasina-led Awami League government would quickly sign the agreement without any hesitation as it has maintained a close relationship with the US administration ever since it came to power in mid-1996. Some even hoped that the agreement would be signed during the scheduled visit of the US President Bill Clinton that year. But nothing of the sort happened and the Sheikh Hasina government after mulling over the issue for several months decided that the signing of the agreement in its present form would be detrimental to the country’s interests.

The SOFA proposal was criticised by a section of the media, the intelligentsia, and Left-leaning politicians. They felt that the iniquitous provisions of the proposal would work against Bangladesh’s sovereignty and dignity. The pro-liberation group, the

traditional supporters of the Sheikh Hasina government, also held the same view.⁴

The US authorities tried to clarify the situation and pointed out that SOFA was not conceived as a military pact and would not facilitate the establishment of a US military base in Bangladesh. According to them, the agreement was meant to lay down the procedures for “the movement of US personnel and supplies into a host nation for an exercise.” It was also expected to “clarify the legal procedures to be followed, should US military personnel harm individuals or property in the host nation during an exercise.”

Dhaka feared that the SOFA would lead to the unhindered entry of US troops into Bangladesh, without having to comply with even visa and passport formalities. Equipment and supplies would also be allowed to be brought in without being subjected to Customs regulations. This kind of arrangement needed a constitutional amendment which was seen as politically risky. Moreover, the agreement did not provide reciprocal facilities to Bangladeshi defence personnel who may be sent to the US for training or other purposes.

The US troops had been visiting Bangladesh on several occasions in the past to conduct joint military exercises even before the SOFA proposal. The two countries are signatories to a temporary treaty for conducting joint exercises. They also signed a Memorandum of Understanding on the status of US troops and SOFA for one year when a cyclone struck Bangladesh in 1991. During *Operation Sea Angels* about 7,500 military personnel and civilians were involved. The US also provided US\$ 120 million in relief for the victims. Washington saw the proposed SOFA as a logical extension of the MoUs signed by the two countries to determine the status of US forces during joint exercises.

The US overture for the SOFA however found support from the anti-liberation group that was opposed to the liberation of Bangladesh in 1971. This anti-liberation group in Bangladesh was also in alliance with the religious fundamentalists. They called upon the Bangladeshi people to support a Sino-US security initiative for the South Asian region. In 1998, India and Pakistan went overtly

nuclear. The anti-liberation group argued that Bangladesh needed a security umbrella of a major power in the now nuclearised sub-continent. The strategic affairs experts allied to them argued that now Bangladesh needed to enter into a military cooperation agreement with a major nuclear power “even if it meant that one of the islands in the Bay of Bengal would have to be made a base for that power.” This, they felt, was necessary to counter any “Indian design”.⁵

The BNP president and the former Prime Minister of Bangladesh Begum Khaleda Zia accused the Sheikh Hasina government of succumbing to pressure from India not to sign the agreement. It was reported by a section of media that Hasina was advised by then Indian Prime Minister A. B. Vajpayee not to enter into any such agreement with the US. Some analysts argued that since Bangladesh was dependent on foreign aid and assistance, it was not in its interest to antagonise the US over SOFA particularly when the US was also an important investor in Bangladesh. Its total investment at that time was about US\$ 2.8 billion and many expected it to increase it in a big way. They felt that the resulting strain over SOFA might affect those possible investments.

The Sheikh Hasina government also viewed the SOFA from a regional perspective. It pointed out that Bangladesh is an important member of SAARC and as a member of that organisation it was its responsibility not to allow the entry of foreign forces “which may have profound and far-reaching consequences.” It felt that the stationing of foreign troops in Bangladesh or their frequent entry into the country would have an adverse impact on Bangladesh as well as the South Asian region.⁶ It was also felt that for occasional joint exercises and for providing relief during cyclones and floods, the permanent presence of foreign troops in Bangladesh was not required.

The general mood of the public in Bangladesh was unwilling to enter into such a security arrangement where the country had to compromise with its sovereignty in anticipation of economic gains. Bangladesh also felt that any such decision would displease its friends and neighbours. Finally, it was decided that there was no

reasonable ground or need to have an umbrella agreement like the SOFA. In July 1998, the Bangladesh government rejected the US proposal to sign SOFA but reaffirmed their commitment to work in the areas of mutual interest. This was also confirmed by Sheikh Hasina on 2 August 1998, when she said that despite not signing of SOFA, the relationship remained excellent.

Washington however kept pursuing the matter. This was being viewed against the overall perception that the US was moving closer to both India and Bangladesh, setting up a new strategic configuration in the region in which the stiff Indian opposition of yesteryears should be out of place.

The US interest in SOFA was repeated by the US Ambassador to Bangladesh Mary Ann Peters in May 2002. She said that the US has this agreement with many countries around the world and it makes military-to-military cooperation and exchanges easier. The US and Bangladesh had been doing military exercises and training over the years, but every time it required the signing of an MoU by the two sides, which delayed the process. An arrangement like SOFA would make the signing of an MoU unnecessary. She made it clear that “it is not a basing agreement.”⁷

Humanitarian Assistance Need Assessment (HANA)

Bangladesh and the US did not sign the SOFA but they did sign the HANA Agreement. HANA is a diluted form of SOFA but it addressed the concerns of Bangladesh. Under this programme, the US Department of Defense was expected to complete a survey of the country’s needs in times of calamities and disasters. By 25 August 1998, the US military team of experts had identified 11 projects for enhancing the government’s ability to respond to natural disasters.

Defence Supplies to Bangladesh

From the beginning, Bangladesh had been interested in procuring defence equipment from the US. However, the US did not desire an arms supply relationship with Bangladesh. It was willing to go for cash sales on a commercial basis of a limited type of military equipment, such as transport and communication items. For this

purpose, the US government also provided some modest grants. In 1983-84, Bangladesh received a remittance of US\$ 400,000 from the US Services Headquarters for buying these items.

To promote military cooperation between Dhaka and Washington, Major General A. Latif who was the Principal Staff Officer to the President, visited Washington in 1988. The objective of the visit was to explore the possibilities for Bangladesh to purchase US military supplies. He was well-received but did not succeed in his objective. Bangladesh however persisted with its efforts and subsequently received some military equipment under various US programmes.

US Excess Defense Articles (EDA) Program

Under the Excess Defense Articles (EDA) Program, the United States transfers surplus military equipment to build partner capacity, provide urgently needed capabilities, and deepen relationships with allies and partners. Equipment under this Program is available at a greatly reduced cost, but on “as is, where is” condition. Like all other US defence sales and transfers, the State Department carefully evaluates all proposed cases to ensure they support US national security and foreign policy goals and recipient countries agree not to re-transfer the item without permission, and to abide by the stated conditions on the item’s end-use.⁸

Under the Program, the US transferred twelve T-37B Primary Jet Trainers to Bangladesh. T-37B was twin-seat trainer aircraft, a proven design, long used, and was being used by the US Air Force to train jet pilots. However, this aircraft was not capable of carrying armaments. But this transfer was viewed as the most significant transfer of military equipment. Subsequently, the US government also delivered four C-130B aircraft as a ‘gift’ to Bangladesh for enhancing the country’s capability in peacekeeping operations by the Bangladesh Air Force (BAF).

The Bangladesh Navy has also benefited from the EDA Program and received many vessels. It is on a massive procurement drive following the ITLOS ruling of March 2012 on its maritime boundary with Myanmar. The Bangladesh Navy’s *BNS Somudra Avijan* (formerly *USCGC Rush*) and the *BNS Somudra Joy* (formerly

USCGC Jarvis) are among the largest ships in the Bangladesh Navy, received under the Program. *BNS Somudra Joy* was transferred in 2013, while *BNS Somudra Avijan* was transferred in 2015 and was the 44th vessel to be transferred to Bangladesh in the last five years under the Foreign Military Sales (FMS) Program.⁹ These ships were helicopter-capable and gave the Bangladesh Navy the high endurance required for persistent patrolling in Bangladesh's Exclusive Economic Zone.¹⁰ They were recently utilized to deliver aid to neighbouring Maldives in support of their COVID-19 response.

Bay of Bengal Initiative

The 'Bay of Bengal Initiative' was launched by the US as part of a maritime security scheme "to help enhance the capacity of civilian and military maritime actors in this vital region, which is home to important sea lanes linking the Indian Ocean to East Asia". For this purpose, the US has provided additional funding of about US\$ 300 million to help the countries in the area to "ensure a free, open, and rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific region". According to the US Department of State, the funding represents "a significant investment" by Washington in its security relationships with Bangladesh, Indonesia, Mongolia, Nepal, the Pacific Islands, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Vietnam, 'and others', and focuses on maritime security, humanitarian assistance, disaster response, enhancement of peacekeeping capabilities, and countering of transnational crime. This is Washington's attempt to strengthen ties with countries in Asia as China increases its assertiveness in the region.

Under the Initiative, towards the end of April 2019, the Bangladesh Navy (BN) received five Metal Shark-built patrol boats from the United States. The US also provided US\$ 5.3 million to cover the total cost of procurement and delivery of the boats which are meant to support the maritime security objectives of the Bangladesh Navy.¹¹ These boats were large enough to operate in coastal and near shore environments in various conditions, while also allowing for expeditionary operations in a wide range of climates. The vessels could be used as multipurpose vessels "in various scenarios to include anti-piracy and counter-terrorism".¹²

Conventional Arms Transfer (CAT) Policy

The Conventional Arms Transfer (CAT) Policy was announced in 2018 to support US allies and partners. It is also meant to expand opportunities for US industry, and preserve US national security while reviewing arms transfers to ensure that they are in US interest. However, any country wanting to buy under the CAT Policy has to sign two foundational agreements --the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) and the Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA) -- with the US.

So far, US defence sales to Bangladesh have been limited and there have been no major platform sales in recent years. The average annual value of sales to Bangladesh between 2010 and 2017 was US\$ 3.7 million and the total value of defence sales up to 2017 was US\$ 74.6 million.

However, now, the US has expressed interest in selling military equipment to Bangladesh and the offer was made by the American Ambassador to Bangladesh Earl R. Miller when he met the Bangladeshi Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen on 31 January 2019.¹³

Subsequently, it was reported in the Bangladeshi media that Dhaka was negotiating to purchase fighter jets, missiles systems, and combat helicopters from the United States to modernise its armed forces. These reports were confirmed by retired Col. Faruk Khan, Chairman of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, who is also a member of the Bangladesh Parliament's Standing Committee on Defence.

This was the first time Dhaka approached the US for large-scale purchases of defence equipment since it was liberated in 1971. In the past, it has relied heavily on purchases of military hardware from China. In late January 2020, Boeing also confirmed that its AH-64E Apache attack helicopter was down-selected for a potential programme in Bangladesh.¹⁴ The US however wants Bangladesh to sign two foundational agreements before any major platform could be transferred.¹⁵ Both governments and military forces are in talks now to conclude those deals. The US thinks that these accords would reaffirm that the US and Bangladesh “have common regional and global interests and seek long-term co-operation”.¹⁶

The Acquisitions and Cross Servicing Agreement (ACSA)

The objective of the Acquisitions and Cross Servicing Agreement (ACSA) is to allow the US and partner nations' forces to procure and pay for common types of logistical support, supplies, and services in a way that fosters cooperation. For example, ACSA may facilitate the transfer of fuel from the Bangladesh military to visiting US naval ships participating in annual training exercises. It could also improve the US' ability to respond to humanitarian or natural disasters through cooperation with Bangladesh by, for example, facilitating the transfer of fuel from the US military to Bangladesh naval ships operating outside their normal areas.¹⁷ The US has ACSA accords with over 100 countries, including India and Sri Lanka.

The agreement does not in any way commit a partner nation to military action nor does it authorise stationing of ships, aircraft, or military personnel in foreign countries. It only serves to simplify procurement agreements, logistic support, supplies, and services between partner forces.¹⁸

The General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA)

The General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) is regarded as a reciprocal agreement that does not commit governments to share information but rather commits governments to protect classified military information if shared. The Agreement provides a mechanism by which, when information or technology is shared, both sides are assured that it will be protected. This Agreement is also needed for foreign military sales. Under this Agreement, the US security authorities will work closely with Bangladesh's security authorities to develop a plan and a standard operating procedure to implement required measures for making sure classified information will be protected in Bangladesh. The US will also commit that they will protect Bangladesh's military information.¹⁹

The US has such agreements with 76 countries around the world, including several in South Asia. Washington says the pacts strengthen cooperation and advance the "shared interests of trusted partners."

Interestingly, while Bangladesh has shown interest in diversifying its suppliers, it has also shown a preference to procure from Europe, particularly France and Italy. For example, Leonardo has recently supplied Bangladesh with AW109 maritime utility helicopters, while Airbus has provided the country with a C295W tactical transport aircraft.²⁰

Enhanced International Peacekeeping Capabilities Programme

During the Gulf war in 1991, Bangladesh contributed a contingent of 2,300 troops to the anti-Iraq coalition led by the United States. Bangladesh troops also participated alongside US troops in the Haiti mission in 1994. The participation of Bangladesh's armed forces in *Operation Desert Shield* with the US forces in the Gulf, paved the way for better understanding, trust, and mutual confidence. As a result of good partnership, the US responded to Bangladesh's proposal to assist in a Peacekeeping Operation Training Centre (PKOTC) at Rajendrapur, Dhaka. This Centre has proved useful as Bangladesh has participated in 26 UNPK missions since 1988. The PKOTC aims at providing services to other countries also in the Asia-Pacific region, with further US assistance.

US Supporting Bangladesh to Develop Unmanned Aircraft System (UAS)

The US State Department-led Global Peace Operations Initiative (GPOI) and other capacity-building programmes have invested more than US\$ 1.5 billion in training and equipping troops and police specifically for service in peacekeeping missions since 2005. Keeping in view the important role played by the Bangladeshi military personnel in UN peacekeeping missions, the US Department of State has pledged at least US\$ 13 million in support of Bangladesh's plan to develop an unmanned aircraft system (UAS) capability for deployment in UN peacekeeping operations. According to the State Department, the move was part of Washington's "commitment to assist the UN in addressing capability shortfalls, including critical intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance capabilities that will strengthen mission operations."

It also stated that the US Department of Defense will be “further providing training, technology, and subject matter expertise on a variety of topics, including advising the UN on how to incorporate and more effectively employ UAS capabilities into their missions”.²¹ Interestingly, as part of the Forces Goal 2030 Programme, which is meant to modernise the Bangladesh military, its Air Force was also looking for a single UAV system that would augment new platforms. It seems Bangladesh is cleverly using the requirements of the UN to modernise its defence forces with US support.

The International Military Education Training (IMET) Programme

Since the late 1970s Bangladesh Armed Forces personnel receive professional training assistance from the US through the International Military Education Training (IMET) programme every year. Under the Programme training is imparted at the Military Academy and Staff College. Visits of high-level military delegations and combined exercises are also held under the Programme and Pacific Area Senior Officers Logistic Seminars (PASOLS) and Pacific Armies Management Seminars (PAMS) are also organised. Washington provided US\$ 3.3 million in 2018 to send 233 members of the Bangladesh military to attend various military professionalisation courses within the US and the wider Indo-Pacific region.²²

US-Bangladesh Joint Military Exercises/Relief Operations/Disaster Management

To develop closer understanding and cooperation Bangladesh and the US have been conducting joint military exercises since 1988. These exercises are also carried out in fields like medical sciences, veterinary sciences, Special Forces operations, public relations, and humanitarian assistance. They are carried out under different code names like Baker Bullet, Baker Bandage, Badge Bundle, Code South, etc.

After the cyclone in 1991 *Operation Sea Angel* was conducted in which the US Department of Defense responded with over US\$ 28 million in-kind assistance including medical supplies, other relief commodities, and repair of the Chittagong Airport by Corps

of Engineering personnel. The US also dispatched a joint task force of 4600 marines and 2965 sailors, along with seven ships including the helicopter carrier *USS Tarawa*, 28 helicopters, and ten landing craft. The relief mission engaged in air and amphibious transport, communications, medical and engineering assessments, and assistance. The relief efforts of US troops are credited with having saved as many as 200,000 lives. In *Operation Sea Angel* about 7,500 military personnel and civilians were involved. The US also provided US\$ 120 million in relief for the victims.

Operation Seabat was held in the Bay of Bengal jointly by the US Navy and Bangladesh Navy and Air Force in August 1995. This exercise focused on cooperation between the US and Bangladesh naval forces in the fields of surveillance and search and rescue operations during natural calamities, a legacy of the 1991 post-cyclonic disaster rescue *Operation Sea Angel*. The two Air Forces also tried to forge cooperation in search and rescue techniques.

‘Cooperation Afloat Readiness and Training’ (‘CARAT’) Exercise

The United States conducts the ‘Co-operation Afloat Readiness and Training’ (‘CARAT’) Exercise every year. ‘CARAT’ is the name given to a series of bilateral naval drills between the US Navy and the armed forces of nine partner countries in South and Southeast Asia. The nine countries are Bangladesh, Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Timor-Leste. This Exercise is conducted to develop interoperability between the US Navy and the navies of the Asia-Pacific.²³

Operation Monogram

To promote regional stability and ensure a free and open Indo-Pacific region, a trilateral special operations exchange between the militaries of Bangladesh, the United States, and the United Kingdom took place in Bangladesh lasting four weeks (16 February to 12 March 2020). It was the first-ever exchange involving the US and the UK militaries with the Bangladesh Army and Bangladesh Navy.²⁴ The joint effort was meant to improve interoperability in responding

to security threats and crises in the region through the exchange of techniques, ideas, and practices. The US Ambassador Earl R. Miller, who spoke at the closing ceremony, claimed that the security cooperation was aimed at upholding the “ideals of sovereignty, open economies that transcend borders, and adherence to the rule of law”. The Bangladesh Navy used the Metal Shark boats recently acquired from the United States, which are ideal for operating in Bangladesh’s predominantly riverine and coastal landscape.²⁵

The continued support of the US for US-Bangladesh military exercises hosted by Bangladesh indicated that the US-Bangladesh defence relationship is important to Washington.

US-Bangladesh Partnership Dialogue

The US-Bangladesh Partnership Dialogue, established in 2012, aims for cooperation across the full range of bilateral and regional issues.²⁶ It also sets up a forum in which annual consultation is envisaged at the level of foreign secretary/under-secretary and periodic consultations at the foreign minister-level.²⁷ Discussions take place on a range of bilateral issues including migration, climate change, disaster management, health, higher education, agricultural cooperation, Diaspora, regional cooperation, blue economy, peacekeeping and peacebuilding, counter-terrorism and countering violent extremism, and higher education.

US-Bangladesh Bilateral Security Dialogue

The growing security relationship of the US with Bangladesh is reflected in the establishment of the US-Bangladesh Security Dialogue in 2012. In the Dialogue discussions often focus on efforts to expand partnerships in humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, peacekeeping, defence trade, military cooperation, and counter-terrorism, as well as maritime security and regional issues.²⁸ The Dialogue also highlights that security cooperation is a “key component” in bilateral cooperation. The US has reiterated its support to the armed forces and law enforcers of Bangladesh in enhancing capacity through various forms of training, sharing of information, sophisticated equipment, and joint exercises.²⁹

Conclusion

Bangladesh and the US had started as adversaries but both took a pragmatic view of the bilateral relationship soon after liberation of East Pakistan into Bangladesh in 1971. Initially, the US remained lukewarm to Bangladesh as its geographical location was not very attractive and the only major foreign policy interest of the US in Bangladesh was to prevent it from falling into the lap of communism and the Soviet Union. For that, economic help was considered to be more effective than any defence partnership. This made Bangladesh tie-up with China in a major way. The US then had no problem with this, as it was itself trying to get close to the Chinese.

However, in the post-Cold War era, international politics has dramatically changed. Now China has emerged as a major power and is threatening US dominance not only in the Asia-Pacific but also in the Indo-Pacific. Meanwhile, the US has come closer to India, which has brought about a complete change in the geopolitics of the region.

The US previously announced the ‘pivot to Asia’ policy under which it wanted to shift its major military assets to Asia, considering China as a major challenger to its predominance. Now, it has an Indo-Pacific Strategy (IPS) to handle an emerging and assertive China. Countries of South and South East Asia figure prominently in this Strategy. This has also increased the importance of Bangladesh for the US. After Bangladesh participated in the Gulf War with the US, both countries have been conducting regular military exercises with each other. The US now wants to enhance the militaries of this region who share a common vision with it and its defence forces.

Bangladesh initially wanted to establish a military relationship with the US. It was the US that was dragging its feet. Now as the Indo-Pacific is becoming a priority for the US, so is Bangladesh. Bangladesh’s booming economy and expansion in its maritime area after the ITLOS verdict has prompted it to bolster its military strength. Bangladesh believes that modernising its military is essential to address the changing geopolitical environment and to bring professionalism in the military.³⁰ At the same time, the Bangladesh military is facing a difficult choice. Bangladesh wants to diversify its

sources of weapons procurement to reduce its dependence on China and was disappointed by the Chinese stance on the Rohingya issue, where it hopes to get help from the US.³¹

However, to source major weapon systems from the US, Bangladesh has to sign certain foundational agreements. Bangladesh also looks for loans from its suppliers. It is also apprehensive that the signing of these agreements might affect its relationship with China which remains its largest defence equipment provider. Now, Bangladesh's defence and military relationship with the US is interestingly poised. Its future will depend on how some of these issues are sorted out.

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6. The Role of Bangladesh in UN Peacekeeping Operations

Bangladesh is a leading provider of troops in UN peacekeeping operations. The country started participating in these missions nearly three decades ago. The peacekeepers have become part of Bangladesh's international identity and are its strongest arm of diplomacy. It has considerably changed the image of Bangladesh, a country that was earlier known for political instability, natural disasters, and economic problems. Bangladesh provides these forces for economic, political, and diplomatic reasons. Participation in the UN missions has helped the Bangladesh armed forces develop professionally. At the same time, it has also impacted the nature of civil-military relations in the country.

UN Viewed in Bangladesh as a Source of Security, Legitimacy and Economic Assistance

Bangladesh was born as a nation in a significant breach of the international convention. Its emergence as an independent nation required a break-up of the international order. It was created through a war of secession. Moreover, the secession was completed with external assistance.

Once independent, Bangladesh was however very keen to preserve the international order. It wanted to project that it was not a secessionist state in the traditional sense, as the majority population had separated from the minority population of West Pakistan. Further, it did not want to give the impression that the state system was breaking down in the post-colonial world and

the ex-colonial Third World countries were on the threshold of redrawing their political maps. On the other hand, it presented her case as unique and supported the well-ordered, conventional state system. The policymakers of Bangladesh felt that the interests of the country would be better served by getting linked to an orderly structure of the harmonious state-to-state relationship sustained by global institutions like the UN. It was too weak to challenge the prevailing norms and wanted to seek approval of the Global State System by becoming a member of the UN and by showing its commitment to obey its rules. This was seen in its eagerness to join the UN.

UN as a Source of Legitimacy

For a breakaway state, the easiest way to gain legitimacy was to acquire the membership of the UN. The membership of this organisation would have meant international recognition of Bangladesh as an independent and sovereign state. This made the acquisition of membership of the UN a priority issue for the Bangladeshi policymakers. However, given the history of the Bangladesh Liberation War, a hurdle from China and Pakistan was expected. It was easy for Bangladesh to handle Pakistan's opposition as they claimed that Pakistan itself had lost the membership of the world body with the dismemberment of the earlier state. Chinese opposition was difficult to manage as they were armed with veto power. They used their veto power to stall Bangladesh's membership. Things changed for Bangladesh after they signed the Tripartite Agreement and Pakistan itself recognised the new state. After this development, the draft resolution for the membership of the UN was unanimously accepted on 17 September 1974.

Once Bangladesh became a member of the UN, it gave the world body its total support. It pledged total allegiance to the purposes and principles of the UN Charter. It supported all measures to strengthen the UN. It sought expansion of its role as an arbitrator in an international dispute. It emphasized the potential of the International Court of Justice (ICJ).

UN Seen as Insurer of Security and Sovereignty

The UN has been an important element in the foreign policy of Bangladesh. The country sees the UN as the insurer of its security and sovereignty. It is a useful forum to relate to other countries of the world which may not be otherwise possible for Bangladesh for want of resources. It is a source of moral and material support.

Bangladesh shares its land border with India and Myanmar. India had helped Bangladesh in its Liberation. Despite that, Bangladesh perceives India as a potential security threat just because of its size. It is also concerned by India's economic and military power. A war-ravaged Bangladesh needed peace to rebuild its society and economy. The amalgamation of Sikkim into India in 1974 was not perceived positively in Bangladesh. The policymakers of the country thought that the membership of the UN will prove useful to enhance the sense of security of Bangladesh. It tried to use the UN on the Farakka issue in 1976.

UN as a Source of Economic Assistance

In Bangladesh, the UN is seen not only as a source of security but also as an institution that could play a positive role in reshaping the world's economic order by protecting the interests of weaker nations. It takes a position which is congruous with the 'North-South Debate' and wants the industrial nations to take initiatives that lead to a more equitable sharing of the world's resources.

The UN is also a major source of economic assistance for Bangladesh. Several UN agencies are active in the country and have committed large sums of money. As a multilateral body, the UN embraces the widest spectrum of ideologies and is generally a non-controversial source of assistance, which is why Bangladesh likes to work in close cooperation with the UN and its agencies.

Though UN assistance is generally seen as apolitical, it is not always devoid of political content. Bangladesh had initially asked the UN to clear Chittagong Port which they did not do citing a shortage of funds. When Bangladesh reached out to the Soviets, they decided to undertake the salvage operation of sunken ships at Chalna Port which was a major nerve centre for jute trade. The UN

decided to fund the project from available resources and completed it ahead of schedule.

The United Nations is a blessing for countries like Bangladesh. It allows them to play a role in international politics disproportionate to their economic and military strengths. The proper functioning of the UN makes for an orderly world, in line with the interests of weaker states. The United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) allows Bangladesh to take a stand at variance with major powers when required. It also brings them several benefits. No wonder, Bangladesh has maintained a high level of engagement with the UN. It is consistently one of the highest contributors to UN peacekeeping operations. This participation in the UN peacekeeping operations keeps her armed forces – an important element of her policymaking – engaged, contented, and well-resourced.

Bangladesh's Motivations for Joining Peacekeeping Operations

Bangladesh has shown keen interest to participate in peacekeeping operations. There is no constitutional hindrance either. The Constitution of Bangladesh in its Preamble says that it wants the country to make “full contribution towards international peace and co-operation in keeping with the progressive aspirations of mankind.”¹ Bangladesh does not face any serious external security threats and the internal security challenges are not big enough to constrain the deployment of the armed forces to UN peacekeeping missions. Some other factors that motivate the country to participate in UN missions are the following.

Political and Security Reasons

The checkered political history of Bangladesh plays an important role in explaining its active participation in UN peacekeeping operations. A section of the Bangladeshi people during its Liberation War in 1971 faced genocide, displacement, torture, and threats to human security. This experience should have ideally made them and their army in independent Bangladesh, better appreciate the problems of other people trapped in ongoing conflicts. Unfortunately, that did

not happen. On the contrary, the bloody and painful separation of Bangladesh from Pakistan helped create an army that was heavily politicised. This politicisation of the army manifested itself when some army officers in a coup killed Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on 15 August 1975. The Bangladesh military took control of the state between 1975 and 1990. Though democracy was restored in 1990, it did not mean a complete end to the military's involvement in politics. In Bangladesh, the army remains one of the most powerful actors. The political parties in Bangladesh have welcomed the military's participation in peacekeeping in the hope that such missions would help the Bangladesh army imbibe democratic values and lead to healthier civil-military relations in the country. A military busy in peacekeeping is less likely to engage in disruptive activities at home, which has been a permanent concern for the civilian government.

The military's aversion to take over the government was seen in 2007 when Bangladesh was unable to hold general elections because of confrontational politics. A caretaker government was installed with the support of the army. The general population welcomed this development but despite the general feeling of goodwill, the generals refused to openly take over power. It is often argued that the military leadership did not go for complete takeover as it would have aroused negative feelings abroad. This in turn would have reduced the acceptability of the Bangladeshi armed forces as an accountable and legitimate peacekeeping force.

International Prestige

Participation of Bangladesh in the peacekeeping operations with the active support of development partners like the United States helps the country enhance its profile on the regional and global forums. It improves Bangladesh's international reputation and builds its soft power. This in turn helps Bangladesh to claim relevant positions for its diplomats in UN organisations. To recognise the contribution of Bangladesh, Sierra Leone has declared Bangla as their country's second language. Liberia has named its capital's major street after Bangladesh.

Financial Reasons

The deployment of forces under UN peacekeeping operations accrues financial and material benefits for the country. The salaries and compensations paid by the UN are substantially higher. A significant amount of earning from UN operations goes to the soldiers.

There is no doubt that Bangladesh has made considerable economic progress over the last two-and-a-half decades. Its gross national income per capita was US\$ 1,909 in 2019.² In July 2015, the country graduated from a least developed country to low-middle income developing country. Despite this progress, the country still struggles with a high density of population and limited economic resources. This makes the government look for an opportunity abroad and participation in the UN peacekeeping operations fits the bill perfectly. The substantially higher remuneration and compensation offered by the UN is attractive to Bangladeshi soldiers and police. This is because domestic employment opportunities and wages are limited.

In 2013, the UN was paying at a flat rate of US\$ 1,028 for every soldier to the troop-contributing countries. However, the Bangladesh government fixes a sliding rate based on the rank of officers and troops in the armed forces. The officers and soldiers receive 20 per cent of the amount while they are serving and the rest 80 per cent in two installments when they return. While serving in the UN missions, they also receive their monthly salaries as per the national salary scale. The financial rewards for Air Force members are particularly high. Often Air Force officers who fly UN aircraft in peacekeeping operations earn US\$ 3,000 per flying hour in addition to other perks and benefits.

Recently, the situation has changed somewhat, with the gradual strengthening of the Bangladeshi economy and the economic opportunities offered by the private sector. Some officers no longer consider UN missions to be as financially lucrative as they had been in the past. However, soldiers and non-commissioned officers still find the economic opportunities offered by participation in UN missions attractive. This section is, unfortunately, not able to avail the opportunities offered by the prosperous private sector.

In the initial decades after Liberation, the officer corps of the military came from the elitist background. Now a number of them are coming from the middle and lower-middle-class, making the officers' corps more socially representative. The Pakistan-era officers are gradually passing away and are being replaced by Bangladesh Military Academy graduates. These new officers are seen as largely free of various divisions and are more professional in outlook. These new social groups show more enthusiasm about UN missions for financial reasons. Some argue that this changing composition of soldiers has also reduced the intervention of the military in politics. For the majority of such officers, participation in peacekeeping missions tends to address both professional training and economic needs.

The financial benefit to the peacekeepers also supports the country's economy indirectly. The Bangladesh government received US\$ 1.28 billion from the UN as compensation for troop contributions, contingent-owned equipment, and other forms of compensation during 2001-10. The Bangladesh Armed Forces earned US\$ 72 million from its peacekeeping operations in 2012-13. The financial benefit to the Bangladesh Police has been to the tune of BTD 40 billion (US\$ 513 million) in the last two decades from UN peacekeeping operations. UN peacekeeping allows the Bangladesh Army to acquire and maintain expensive weapons which it cannot in normal circumstances. It also helps the Army reward its personnel.

There are also some indirect economic benefits coming to the country because of UN peacekeeping. Bangladesh businesses sometimes get contracts in new markets, especially in the pharmaceutical and agricultural sectors. For instance, Bangladeshi entrepreneurs have leased land in African countries to establish farms. This helps meet the food requirements of both Bangladesh and the host countries.

Normative Reasons

Bangladesh has seen the UN as an asset for weaker nations in the global state system. It has stated support for the principles of the UN and its role in the maintenance of international peace and security.

Its contribution to troops for peacekeeping operations promotes a positive image of the country and makes it known for things other than bad politics or natural disasters. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina as co-chair of the September 2015 UN Peacekeeping Summit in New York, assured the international community of her administration's commitment to contribute troops to the UN peacekeeping operations. Bangladesh's contribution to UN peace operations especially in Francophone areas of Africa was also appreciated by the UN Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping, Harvey Ladsus in 2016.

Institutional Reasons

In Bangladesh, the military plays a key role in decisions regarding peacekeeping operations. Besides financial gains, it has strong institutional reasons for participating in peacekeeping operations. The peacekeeping operations provide an opportunity for the Bangladeshi soldiers to interact with foreign armed forces which improve their professional skills. The multinational exposure helps them acquire operational expertise and first-hand knowledge of the latest doctrines and military equipment. The participation in peacekeeping operations allows the Bangladesh military to acquire equipment and weapon platforms that might otherwise be difficult for them to procure. The professional skills of the soldiers are enhanced through language training, increased inter-personal skills, and interacting with foreign troops in military tasks.

Peacekeeping has also made Bangladesh create state-of-the-art training institutions like the Bangladesh Institute of Peace Support Operations Training (BIPSOT). This prestigious facility gives training to foreign and Bangladeshi personnel. BIPSOT has benefited from active support provided by the United States and other Western countries. The establishment of world-class training institutions has enhanced the professional image of the Bangladesh Army.

Prerogative of Military to Take Decision on UNPK

The process of decision-making starts with the UN Secretariat which requests for peacekeepers. This request is received by Bangladesh's Permanent Mission at the UN on behalf of the Ministry of Foreign

Affairs (MoFA). The Mission and the MoFA examine the mandate of the Mission in light of Bangladesh's broader foreign policy priorities and existing international commitments. Then the Defence Attaché at the Permanent Mission sends the request after completing the bureaucratic formalities to relevant agencies in Bangladesh. In Bangladesh presently, there is no central authority or coordination committee for this purpose. The Government of Bangladesh, Armed Forces Division (AFD), Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) and the Bangladesh Police play a crucial role in taking decisions regarding sending of troops and police personnel for the UN mission, based on a generic Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed in December 2007 as part of the UN Standby Arrangement System (UNSAS).

In Bangladesh, the tactical decision regarding the participation in the UN peacekeeping operation is monopolised by the Bangladesh Army and this prerogative so far has not been challenged by the civilian authorities. The Defence Attaché at the UN sends the requests related to the troops to the Armed Forces Division, which is the coordinating headquarters of the Army, Navy, and Air Force. In the Army Headquarters in Dhaka, the Overseas Operations Directorate handles the peacekeeping operations. Any request for naval and Air Force components are then sent to Navy and Air Force Headquarters in Dhaka. They in turn issue necessary directives. The soldiers from the Army are arranged by the Overseas Operations Directorate from the concerned branches. It includes the selection of personnel and the provision of training and equipment. The request for police personnel is received by the MHA which sends this request to the Police Headquarters in Dhaka that decides on the selection of personnel.

Intimate Link between Diplomacy and Peacekeeping

In Bangladesh as elsewhere, there is an intimate link between diplomacy and peacekeeping. The link begins from the conceptual stage and continues until the end of the mission. During this period the diplomats of the contributing country have to monitor the situation in the crisis area and also keep an eye on other important

developments in international relations. Diplomats take these developments into account in formulating policy and decision-making. Then the peacekeeping operation is implemented with military and police commanders and other stakeholders on the ground. The troop-contributing countries try to negotiate best terms so that they can meet their objectives before they commit their peacekeepers for any particular mission.

The Capacity Development of the Peacekeepers

The capacity development of peacekeepers is another important aspect of their deployment. The soldiers going to the peacekeeping operations require skillsets that are different from the routine combatant skills of military personnel. Moreover, the UN peacekeeping operations also started changing from 1990 onwards.

The tasks assigned through the UN mandate are growing. The challenges for peacekeepers vary from mission to mission. In every mission, they face different tasks, different scenarios, different conflicting parties, and different stakeholders' interests, especially of major powers. There is a debate within the UN itself whether the UN forces should be engaged in counter-terrorism tasks at all. However, as things stand today, most future missions are likely to be in areas where the fighting is still on and often there is no peace to keep.

Peacekeeping: More Political than Military Component

Now peacekeeping has more of a political than a military component. Everything that the peacekeepers are supposed to do is designed to push forward a political process. There has to be credible progress on the political roadmap that has been agreed upon by the parties to continue the peacekeeping operations. Peacekeepers also have to foresee the consequence of a fast-evolving situation on the ground and be prepared to face it. Often the situation deteriorates and a need arises for peacemaking or peace enforcing. The UN these days is also involved in peace-building.

Bangladesh Institute of Peace Support Operation Training (BIPSOT)

To cater to the special skill requirements of new-generation peacekeepers, Bangladesh established the Peacekeeping Operations and Training Centre (PKOTC) in 1999. In 2002, the PKOTC was remodeled and renamed as Bangladesh Institute of Peace Support Operation Training (BIPSOT) after more capacities and resources were added to it. BIPSOT provides specialised training to potential UN peacekeepers before their deployment.

The BIPSOT is a globally recognised peacekeeping training institution. It conducts deployment and other thematic training such as disarmament, protection of civilians, prevention of conflict-induced sexual harassment, and so on. It has a partnership with national and international bodies. It is well equipped in terms of both infrastructure and technical expertise. BIPSOT courses have been recognised by the US Department of State.

There is no similar organisation to give specialised training to the police personnel who are sent to the Police Staff College at Dhaka and the Police Academy at Rajshahi to attend special training programmes designed for peacekeeping operations.

Bangladesh Peacebuilding Centre (BPC)

Another institution known as Bangladesh Peacebuilding Centre (BPC) was established in November 2016. This institution was established with Japanese assistance.³ The core objective of the Centre is to impart training in light of the expertise required in emerging peacebuilding opportunities worldwide for developing a skilled, experienced, and rapidly deployable workforce. It also researches peacebuilding and tries to engage with national and international stakeholders in the peacebuilding effort.⁴

Bangladesh's Contribution to Peace Operations

The contribution of Bangladesh to the UN peace operations started even when it was not a member of the UN. It sent a medical team of 28 members to Syria in the aftermath of the Arab-Israeli war in 1973.

Army

The Army's formal participation in peacekeeping missions started in 1988 with 15 military observers to the UN Iran-Iraq Military Observation Group (UNIIMOG) mission. In 1991, Bangladesh Army contingents with 1002 peacekeepers led by an infantry unit first joined the UN Assistance Mission in Cambodia (UNAMIC). Since then, Bangladeshi peacekeepers have served in missions in the Middle East, Africa, Europe, and Asia. Within a short period, Bangladesh has emerged as a leading provider of UN peacekeepers.

The United Nations Iraq-Kuwait Observation Mission (UNIKOM) was established on 9 April 1991, following the Gulf War. In response to the Secretary-General's request, the Government of Bangladesh agreed to contribute a mechanised infantry battalion to the UNIKOM. An advance team arrived in the mission area in mid-November 1993, followed by the remainder of the battalion during December and early January 1994.⁵ The contribution of Bangladesh in the Gulf War was debated within the country as at that time Bangladesh was very friendly with Saddam Hussein. Moreover, the military had no formal training. The forces had no understanding of the difference between a peacekeeping force and an observer mission. But after a week of deliberations, the country finally decided to send its troops to *Operation Moruprantor*.

In the 1990s, besides Cambodia and the Gulf, Bangladesh participated in peacekeeping missions in Rwanda, Mozambique, Somalia, Haiti, Angola, Sierra Leone, Congo, East Timor, and parts of the former Yugoslavia. On one occasion, Bangladeshi troops served concurrently in three major UN missions: Mozambique (February 1993-December 1994), Rwanda (October 1993-February 1994), and Somalia (July 1993-February 1995).

Over the last 32 years, the peacekeepers from Bangladesh have completed 54 operations in around 40 countries. A total of 146,095 personnel participated in those missions. As of 31 March 2020, Bangladesh has lost 150 uniformed peacekeepers in different missions with over 200 injured.⁶ The armed forces contributed 90 percent and the police 10 per cent of this total.

Navy

For the first time, the Armed Forces Division (AFD) asked the Bangladesh Navy in 1991 to contribute naval personnel. However, at that time it was not prepared for this task. The first independent Bangladesh Navy contingent was deployed in UNIKOM in 1997 to patrol the waterways, demarcating the Iraq-Kuwait border as a part of the enforcement of the demilitarised zone. Following that, the Bangladesh Navy deployed its four independent units in Sudan and boat detachment unit in the Ivory Coast in 2005. It continued there for 12 years.

Subsequently, the Bangladesh Navy ventured into more enterprising tasks with the deployment of two ships as part of the full-fledged UN naval mission in Lebanon in 2010. In the Multinational Maritime Task Force in the Mediterranean, it contributed a naval frigate and an offshore patrol vessel to the UN Interim Forces in Lebanon (UNIFIL). On 12 May 2014, two naval warships, *BNS Ali Haidar* and *BNS Nirmul* joined the UNIFIL mission with 320 sailors and naval officers. They replaced *BNS Osman* and *BNS Madhumati*, which were deployed to patrol the Mediterranean as part of the mission mandate. They participated in border patrolling and joint exercises.

Such deployment in the Mediterranean Sea, almost 8,000 km away from Bangladesh was a testimony to the operational and sustenance capability of the Bangladesh Navy. This kind of deployment provides tremendous benefits in terms of training of Bangladesh Navy personnel. Besides that, the Bangladesh government is also earning huge foreign currency through this deployment. For the two ships, Bangladesh received Tk 110 crore and for the other 14 high-speed boats deployed in South Sudan, it received Tk 60 crore per year. The Bangladesh Navy now seems to be prepared to provide more ships. As of 31 March 2017, the Bangladesh Navy has contributed 6,904 personnel in 29 UN peacekeeping missions. Bangladesh is now the fourth-largest contributor.

Air Force

The Bangladesh Air Force (BAF) started its UN peacekeeping operations with only 26 members in Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1993. The BAF deployed three Bell-212 helicopters in Côte d'Ivoire, six

Mi-17 helicopters, and one C-130B aircraft in the Democratic Republic of Congo. In September 2015, the BAF sent 110 members and three Mi-17 helicopters to a UN Stabilisation Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH). By now, the BAF has contributed more than 5000 personnel in 17 countries. At present they are operating in four different countries with six helicopters and one transport aircraft. UN engagement has increased their knowledge and experience of working in different operational environments, even in a war-like situation. It has increased the flying-hour experience and maintenance capacity of BAF personnel. So far, the BAF has flown about 42,000 hours in the mission area.

Police

The police contingent deployed by the UN plays a vital role in maintaining law and order, providing security, and protecting civilians from physical violence and human rights abuses. By the early decades of the 21st century, the participation of police personnel has become an integral part of the UN peace operations that have grown in size and mandate. They work along with the military and civilians in an integrated way, implementing complex and multifaceted mandates. Bangladesh police personnel have participated in most of these missions and performed both in-line (executive) policing and capacity-building functions with local police forces to assist the host nation.

So far, Bangladesh has deployed a total of 20,322 police personnel in UN missions. Out of these, 1,485 were women. In March 2020, 665 members of Bangladesh Police were taking part in the United Nations peacekeeping missions, and out of these, 159 were female police officers (Bangladesh Police, 2018).

Bangladesh is contributing a significant percentage of the police force required by the UN. Bangladesh Police personnel have been deployed as Independent Police Observers (IPOs) or United Nations Police (UNPOL) officers and Formed Police Units (FPU) in East Timor, Democratic Republic of Congo, Cote d'Ivoire, Darfur (Sudan), South Sudan, Haiti, Liberia, and Mali. Generally, they are deployed for a year in both IPO and FPU roles. Some police officers, like IPOs, get an extension from six months to one year in their respective missions.

Bangladesh Police in UN Missions at a Glance
(as on 8 March 2020)

Bangladesh Police	No. of Countries	No. of Missions
Bangladesh Police working as FPU	3	4
Bangladesh Police working as UNPOL	5	5
Bangladesh Police working as a secondment	2	2

Mission Completed Peacekeepers		19,657
P-level/UNP Jobs completed	26	
IPO/UNPOL Mission completed	4609	
FPU Mission completed	15022	

Mission Completed Female Peacekeepers

Unit	Number of Peacekeepers	Total
FPU	1260	1326
UNPOL	66	

Presently deployed (Total)

FPU	600	665
IPO/UNPOL	62	
UN JOB	3	

Presently deployed Female Peacekeepers

FPU	MONUSCO = 77	149	159
	MINUJUSTH = 0		
	MINUSMA - 1 = 22		
	MINUSMA - 2 = 21		
	UNAMID - 1 = 29		
IPO / UNPOL & UN JOB	UNPOL = 09	10	
	UN JOB = 1		

Mission-wise Deployed Personnel At Present

Country	Name of Mission	FPU			UNPOL	UNJOB	Total
Darfur	UNAMID	BANFPU (140)	May 2020	140	29	1	170
DR Congo	MUNUSCO	BANFPU-1 (180)	May 2020	180	2	0	182
Haiti	MINUSTAH						
Mali	MINUSMA	BANFPU-1 (140)	Sep 2020	140	1	0	141
		BANFPU-2 (140)	Sep 2020	140	0	0	140
South Sudan	UNMISS	-	-	0	29	0	29
UNMHA		-	-	-	01	0	1
UNHQ		-	-	-	-	2	2
Thailand	UNDSS	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total				600	62	3	665

Supreme sacrifice peacekeepers	21
Injured Peacekeepers	12

Source: Bangladesh Police, at a Glance Deployment and Completed UN Missions at https://www.police.gov.bd/en/at_a_glance_deployment_and_completed_un_missions. Accessed on 12 May 2020.

Challenges for Bangladesh in UN Policing

Bangladesh has contributed a significant number of police personnel in international policing missions. However, there are several challenges that should be taken into consideration as the police prepares itself for 21st-century peacekeeping. These challenges are bound to be present as UN policing is a difficult job and takes place in troubled areas. Furthermore, the mandate and circumstances differ widely and challenges are often a result of such differences. These challenges could be met successfully if Bangladesh authorities use

the experiences garnered by the returning peacekeepers and make plans accordingly. Though progress has been made in certain areas, gaps remain in some others and one such area is reverse capacity-building.

In international peacekeeping, trends keep changing and there is an ever-widening mandate. To meet these challenges, the Bangladesh police would have to streamline the selection process as the need arises for qualified and trained peacekeepers. More and more countries are willing to offer police contingents which will necessitate that Bangladesh focuses more on quality than quantity. Flexible, mobile, and tech-savvy peacekeeping will increasingly come to dominate future peacekeeping missions. Logistics, equipment, and technology should be a priority. Bangladesh also needs a clear and far-sighted policy on women peacekeepers. The Bangladesh Police needs to think through how reforms such as increasing the representation of women in peacekeeping forces can enable it to become a vehicle for gender equality. It will also have to establish training facilities so that police personnel arrive in their mission areas fully prepared to implement the mission mandate.

Working under Multidisciplinary UN Mandates

Bangladesh Armed Forces have worked under multidisciplinary UN mandates. These mandates include verification of ceasefire, conduct elections and Referendum, specialised engineering tasks, disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration of ex-combatants, an arrangement of surrendering of militias with weapons, ammunition, and drugs, security, and humanitarian assistance, security sector reform, surveillance and maritime interdiction operations at sea, casualty, and medical evacuation, and transportation of personnel and cargo.

The Effort to Maintain Timeline Proposed by the UNSC

Bangladesh has generally tried to maintain the timeline proposed by the UN Security Council Resolutions. The Bangladesh Army has now developed the capability to deploy infantry units within 48 hours of a request being made and sends medical and engineering units within a two to three weeks timeframe. Bangladesh was the

first country to deploy in Mali and the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), under the aegis of the United Nations. The country is in the process of signing the Rapid Deployment Capability-related MOU to increase preparation level and contribute within the shortest possible timeframe.

Contribution of Bangladesh's Military in the Ongoing Peacekeeping Missions

Presently Bangladesh has deployed 6,359 UN peacekeepers belonging to its Army, Navy, and Air Force in eight ongoing UN missions in eight countries. Of these, 5,500 personnel are from the Army. The Bangladesh Navy has deployed its ships and watercraft in UNIFIL (Lebanon) and UNMISS (South Sudan). The Air Force has deployed its helicopters and fixed-wing aircraft in MONUSCO (DR Congo). The armed forces also have a good number of officers working in UNDPKO. The following Table gives a summary of the present total deployment.

	Country	Mission	Army	Navy	Air Force	Total
1	DR Congo	MONUSCO	1355	14	373	1742
2	Lebanon	UNIFIL	0	115	1	116
3	South Sudan	UNMISS	1414	203	03	1620
4	Sudan (Darfur)	UNAMID	353	01	02	356
5	Western Sahara	MINURSO	23	00	03	26
6	Mali	MINUSMA	1322	04	113	1439
7	CAR	MINUSCA	1044	06	03	1053
8	USA (New York)	UNHQ	06	01	00	07
Total	5517	344	498	6359		

Source: Prime Minister's Office, Armed Forces Division at <https://www.afd.gov.bd/un-peacekeeping/ongoing-mission>. Accessed on 13 May 2020.

Position of Bangladesh in UN Peace Operation in terms of Troops Contribution

The presence of Bangladeshi peacekeepers could now be seen in all trouble spots of the world. The country has been the leading troop contributor in 2011, 2014, and 2015. The following table shows the troop contribution made by Bangladesh in the last decade.

Year	Position of Bangladesh
2019	3 rd
2018	2 nd
2017	3 rd
2016	4 th
2015	1 st
2014	1 st
2013	2 nd
2012	2 nd
2011	1 st
2010	2 nd

Source: Prime Minister's Office, Armed Forces Division at <https://www.afd.gov.bd/un-peacekeeping/position-of-bangladesh-in-un-peace-operation>. Accessed on 2 May 2020.

Three Phases of Peace Operations

The participation of Bangladesh in the peacekeeping operations can be categorised into three-phases.

Learning Phase

The first phase (from 1988 to 1998) could be described as the learning phase where Bangladesh started participating in the peace missions and gathered some useful experience. In this phase, Bangladesh participated in peacekeeping missions in Rwanda, Mozambique, Somalia, Haiti, Angola, Sierra-Leone, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Iran-Iraq, East Timor, and parts of the former Yugoslavia. During this period it participated in almost all major missions in Africa.

Bangladesh successfully participated in the two UN-led missions – United Nations Iran-Iraq Military Observer Group (UNIIMOG) and the UN Transition Assistance Group (UNTAG) in Namibia. It also participated in a non-UN mission in the 1991 Gulf War. The Bangladesh Army sent 2193 soldiers to join the United States-led coalition forces to serve various post-intervention stabilisation mandates. They performed the task of sweeping landmines in post-

war Kuwait. In this, 59 Bangladeshi soldiers lost their lives and a number of them were injured. The contribution of Bangladesh has prompted Kuwait to maintain strategic ties with the Bangladesh Armed Forces and hire military experts in times of need. The participation also improved US-Bangladesh strategic ties and since then forces of both countries conduct joint training and exercises as part of their regular military activities.

United Nations Operations in Somalia (UNOSOM I & II): Bangladesh sent its first battalion-sized contingent to the UN Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC). It also participated in United Nations Operations in Somalia (UNOSOM I & II) from 1992 to 1995. In Somalia, conditions were continuously deteriorating due to the threats of the conflicting parties. The mission size was reduced due to the withdrawal of European and American forces. In this mission, Bangladeshi forces were deployed in key strategic areas like the Mogadishu seaport and ensured the safe exit of other troop-contributing countries from UNOSOM.

The Tragic Experience of UNAMIR: The United Nations Assistance Mission in Rwanda (UNAMIR) was a tragic experience for the UN and for the Bangladeshi troops that were part of the UN mission. In this mission, Bangladesh had contributed troops along with European, African, and Asian colleagues. This mission appeared doomed from the beginning, as European countries showed a lack of interest in sending troops, providing airlift and finance for an international force.

In this mission, two large contingents were provided by Ghana and Bangladesh. However, they lacked proper training and technical resources to serve the mission properly. Bangladeshi forces were criticised for lacking preparation and commitment to undertake the mission mandate. They were relying more on Dhaka's command than that of the Force Commander of the mission. Bangladeshi Army officers showed consistent disregard for the orders of the Force Commander to protect civilians in Rwanda. Unfortunately, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) and the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) were equally at fault, failing to provide prudent decisions during emergencies, before the outbreak

of a fully-fledged massacre in Rwanda. The top brass of the UN failed to predict the cataclysmic nature of the problem and could not revise the mandate of the mission to properly equip and guide the troops. Bangladeshi troops were criticised for failing to perform the duties expected from them. Although this mission was unsuccessful, it provided an important learning experience to the Bangladesh Armed Forces.

Second Phase: Protecting Individuals in Proactive Peacekeeping Phase

In the second phase, which lasted from 1998 to 2008, Bangladesh engaged in proactive peacekeeping. This period saw a subtle shift in peacekeeping operations. The UN peace missions during this period were no longer talking about protecting states but rather protecting individuals. Bangladesh, in line with the UN requirements, moved into a more proactive peacekeeping role during this phase.

By this time, Bangladesh had already acquired a decade's experience in peacekeeping missions. In this phase, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) was an important mission for Bangladesh. This mission was significant as its mandate was revised in 2000 to include enforcing measures. Such proactive peacekeeping was required for the more effective protection of the civilians. The UN Resolution also required its troops to recapture the capital Freetown from the control of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF).

To comply with the extended mandate of the UN, Bangladesh quickly deployed a brigade-size force to Freetown. This was an important experience for the Bangladesh armed forces, as it regularised the rapid deployment mechanism as part of its national system as per the UN directives.

During this mission, the Bangladesh armed forces also had to bear casualties when 15 army officers died in a plane crash in Benin on 25 December 2003. Out of these 13 were serving in UNAMSIL while the remaining two were part of the UN Mission in Liberia. Overall, the performance of the Bangladesh peacekeepers was noteworthy in Sierra Leone. To acknowledge their contribution

Sierra Leone's President visited Bangladesh in 2003 and proposed strengthening of the bilateral relations between the two countries.

When the Interim Multilateral Emergency Force (IMEF) withdrew from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) in 2003, Bangladeshi peacekeepers took its place. The mission commenced in September 2003. The Bangladeshi troops worked to improve the security situation in the country and reduce the sufferings of the Congolese people. The DRC's first free and fair elections in 46 years were organised on 30 July 2006. The peacekeepers from Bangladesh under MONUC and later MONUSCO, implemented multiple political and military tasks. They maintained the rule of law, build capacity in various areas, and resolved ongoing conflicts in different parts of the country. They offered humanitarian support through vocational training, establishing schools, and offering knowledge on health-related crises caused by Ebola and AIDS.

The peacekeepers from Bangladesh were involved in similar activities in the Liberian (UNMIL) mission. The engineering brigade from the Bangladesh Army constructed airfields, helipads, and roads. They were made available for both the UNMIL operations and the Liberian people. The Bangladeshi Blue Helmets attenuated the cross-border challenges and protected the lives of civilians by effectively negotiating with Guinean authorities during the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI).

Bangladesh considerably improved upon the shortcomings that were noticed during the first decade of peacekeeping and moved into an era of proactive peacekeeping during the second decade. However, they were considered 'weak' and were criticised as 'soft warriors' when they were deployed in conflict-ridden Liberia. This made many suggest that Bangladeshi peacekeepers are more suitable for development-related activities in post-conflict situations, raising concerns on their possible deployment in future robust peacekeeping.

Third Phase: The Phase of Robust Mandates

The phase after 2008 was known for its robust mandates. In this phase, there was a shift towards more complex and difficult operations. This was Bangladesh's third decade in UN peace missions. In this

phase, Bangladesh contributed troops to Mali, Western Sahara, South Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Dhaka also had to take greater responsibility according to the changing nature of UN peace operations.

In the third phase, the peacekeeping operations grew in number and Bangladesh took on new responsibilities and challenges. Some missions in Liberia, Ivory Coast, and DRC continued from the second phase. In 2013-14 Bangladesh contributed troops to Mali, the Central African Republic (CAR), South Sudan, and Western Sahara.

As the nature of peacekeeping operations has further changed, the UN troops are now expected to protect civilians, collect intelligence in the conflict-prone areas and use sophisticated technologies to reduce casualties among others. The UN now wants to develop capacities of the troop-contributing countries so that the effectiveness of peacekeeping could be bolstered. This means that Bangladesh would now have to enhance its partnership with the UN and other regional organisations in the future.

In the UN operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI), Bangladesh has been contributing troops since it began in 2004. The involvement of the Bangladeshi troops kept changing with the changing mandates of the mission. In 2015 Bangladesh was maintaining two infantry battalions, signal, medical, and engineering corps in strategically important districts of Côte d'Ivoire. The Bangladeshi Battalion (BANBAT) was placed in north-western Côte d'Ivoire, covering an area of about 55,320 sq. km. This volatile area borders Mali, Guinea, and Liberia. The peacekeepers had to maintain regular patrols to protect the civilians from diverse threats coming across the borders. Bangladeshi troops gave enormous support to the 2010 national election and the local elections in 2013. The signal corps of BANBAT helped maintain communications that was useful in the conduct of the election and in maintaining security.

In the third phase, the Bangladeshi troops have displayed a strong commitment to multi-dimensional peace support operations under the auspices of the United Nations. They have undertaken routine tasks like joint patrols. At the same time, they have also

engaged in humanitarian assistance programmes like constructing schools in local areas. They have provided training to local farmers on seasonal cultivation. Bangladeshi troops have conducted medical camps, distributed free drinking water and medicines to the local population. These activities made BANBAT popular among the local people.

Bangladesh showed improvement in the rapid deployment of troops when it contributed troops to the UN-led mission in Mali (MINUSMA). It started its deployment in April 2014 with 112 members of the Bangladesh Army and committed to send six contingents of battalion size and a naval unit. By December 2014, Bangladesh had deployed approximately 1300 troops in Mali.

The deterioration of conditions in the Central African Republic prompted the UN to create the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA). For this mission, the UNSC approved a 12000-strong force in April 2014. This mission also required the swift deployment of the UN troops which could not be accomplished. Bangladesh contributed a contingent of approximately 900 soldiers from its Army for this mission.

Some soldiers were injured in the Mali and CAR missions. Both these missions are examples of missions where UN troops face asymmetric threats. Despite this, the Bangladesh government is willing to contribute troops to the UN as per its requirement.

Sheikh Hasina in the 2015 UN Summit on Peacekeeping Operations, reiterated her government's intention to train the blue helmets for quickest deployment, and provide infantry battalions, form police units, helicopter units, technical units, and other assets to fulfil the needs in peacekeeping missions. She also revealed that the Government of Bangladesh was working on a peacekeeping strategy paper so that the country can better respond to the growing needs of the multi-dimensional missions.

Possible Challenges

There is no doubt that Bangladesh's participation in the UN peacekeeping operations has had a positive impact on civil-military relations in the country. United Nations peacekeeping operations

(UNPKOs) were instrumental in restraining the Bangladesh Army from assuming control of the country, thereby strengthening the democratic process in Bangladesh. However, there are also issues which, if left unattended, could result in controversy and could adversely affect the relationship of the armed forces with the society at large.

The first issue is related to a shift in emphasis from peacekeeping to peacebuilding. It will be important to see how Bangladesh handles this shift. There is a gradual decrease in the number of peacekeeping operations as we know it. UN peace missions have emerged as an attractive option for members of the military and a gradual 'drying up' of such missions may generate friction.

Peacekeeping missions have also influenced defence budgeting and procurement in Bangladesh. When the government concluded an arms deal with Russia worth US\$ 1 billion in January 2013, this deal was partly justified as helping in the general modernisation of the armed forces, an objective outlined in the Forces Goals 2030. However, military officials have particularly emphasized that the purchase was crucial for Bangladesh's peacekeeping missions and that the UN had suggested the procurement of more modern weapons for Bangladeshi peacekeepers.

This purchase became controversial as the government and the armed forces were unwilling to disclose any financial information related to weapons procurement deals. The issue becomes important as Transparency International sees Bangladesh as one of the countries where there is a high risk of corruption in defence purchases. Many argued that participation in UN missions does not provide a convincing rationale for the purchase of Russian arms. They suggest that a variety of other factors like Bangladesh's geopolitical location and threats of potential insurgencies provide a better explanation. The associating of UN peace missions with such controversial deals has the potential to corrode the generally positive opinion of such missions held by wider society and thus undermines support for any future missions. Moreover, this could also affect the overall economic development of the country as the government finds additional funds for the defence budget by curtailing other priority sectors.

Such challenges may lead to a misreading of the armed forces' role on the part of ordinary Bangladeshis and produce a division between the wider society and the armed forces.

Lack of a Peacekeeping Policy

Participation in UN peacekeeping operations has emerged as an important aspect of Bangladesh's foreign policy in a rapidly changing world. It becomes imperative for Bangladesh to understand the nature of challenges and opportunities as a crucial contributor in multilateral peacekeeping endeavours and pragmatically approach them. However, despite participating in UNPK since 1988, the country is yet to formulate a national policy on how to face the challenges of the present and future peacekeeping missions in the 21st century. In the absence of a national peacekeeping policy, the concerned stakeholders often find it difficult to handle the issues concerning peacekeeping in a coordinated manner. For Bangladesh peacekeeping is too important a subject to be approached in an ad-hoc manner. A planned approach will allow the country to derive the maximum benefit.

In the post-Cold War era, the nature of conflict has been changing. Now wars have occurred in a way that tends to elude mediators and military and peace operations to terminate conflict, bypasses the traditional mechanism of conflict resolution, and results in new patterns of human rights abuses and humanitarian concerns. New wars have characteristics of hybrid conflicts in which ethnic mobilisation, various transnational connections (such as to crime), and the state's failure tend to be constituent elements. Conflicts are often intra-state and fighting groups are pursuing varied objectives. Often such groups are supported by a foreign state and non-state actors, which means conflicts are confusing and difficult to solve. As conflicts tend to become intractable and brutal, the idea of peacekeeping itself is expanding and emerging with more robust mandates, such as the use of force under Chapter VII of the Charter. The interventions are now in more perilous operational environments. UN peacekeepers would henceforth need to prepare for, and be ready to engage in, more robust or muscular

peacekeeping. To carry out this new resolve the UNSC has been giving an explicit mandate to favour the robustness of its missions that would allow peacekeepers to use force. It authorised a newly-created 'Force Intervention Brigade' for the UN mission in the DRC to carry out targeted offensive operations. Along with that, it is also giving importance to the protection of civilians as a mandated task for UN peacekeepers. These policies adopted by the UN have also raised questions about the challenges and limitations of the organisation's role as a third-party actor in intractable conflicts. Doubts have been expressed that the UN will ever be structurally equipped and politically suited to take on coercive measures in such wars. Such missions would also hamper the safety and security of peacekeepers. Moreover, a commitment gap also appears, as developed countries are involved in drafting ambitious mandates for future missions but are reluctant to take risks, provide sufficient technical and financial support to shoulder the responsibilities. In such circumstances, how Bangladesh will deal with the exigencies of 'robust missions' including the ability and will to resort to force in defence of the mandate, namely beyond force protection, remains to be clarified. It also raises issues like Bangladesh's capacity for rapid reaction, logistics, communication, intelligence, and its conception of the use of force.

The planners of the peacekeeping operations are also facing the challenge of reorienting the focus of such missions to two megatrends that are shaping and defining conflict climate. These are population growth and urbanisation. It is now often argued that the success of future peacekeeping missions may be won or lost in cities. The UN peacekeepers now may have to operate regularly in densely-populated urban settings characterised by the presence of non-conventional armed groups. The challenges thrown by such missions have shown significant gaps in the capacity of the UN Police (UNPOL). Bangladesh's contingent will need to train for such urban guerrilla warfare.

While Bangladesh is a top troop-contributing country this position cannot be taken for granted. The UN now wants to expand the base of troop and police-contributing countries to enhance

collective burden-sharing and to meet future requirements. The UN does not want to depend on one or two major suppliers of troops and many countries are willing to take up the offer. Bangladesh also has to plan for possible reduction or drying up of UN peacekeeping missions, as the US plans to reduce its contribution to such missions.

Bangladesh will have to prepare a policy to meet these challenges and accept opportunities that comply with its foreign policy. Bangladesh does not face any major internal or external problems in individual force-generation. It intends to participate in missions that have a clear mandate from the UNSC. This applies to both peace-enforcing operations under Chapter VII of the Charter and in peacekeeping operations under Chapter VI. Such operations should be carried out with the consent of the recipient state and other relevant parties. It will also have to create mechanisms to expedite the decision-making process.

The Lakhdar Brahimi Report emphasizes the significance of military readiness and expertise in maintaining the peacekeepers' mandate. It states that peacekeepers must be trained to use arms if forced to defend themselves as well as civilians in host countries. The use of technology has become another important component that the contributing countries have to consider in terms of their preparedness for the mission. Bangladesh will have to provide regular training to its troops meant for UN deployment so that it can deploy a sizeable number of peacekeepers in the shortest possible time once it receives requirements from the UN. It will also have to give attention to the capacity development of women troops and police officers. Greater representation of women can change existing gender imbalances and potentially decrease sexual offenses committed by the perpetrators. Achieving gender balance in peacekeeping operations will promote a wider gender-mainstreaming agenda. Bangladesh will also have to emphasize the capacity development of the peacekeepers according to the changing needs of the UN.

Extensive diplomatic engagements become necessary and useful for troop-contributing countries. The Permanent Mission of Bangladesh in New York plays an important role in UN peacekeeping issues. It has played an active role in convincing other parties to incorporate issues

like South-South cooperation and women's empowerment in UN documents. The Government of Bangladesh can consider exploring diplomatic relations by opening up embassies or high commissions in those countries, where Bangladeshi troops and police have had an effective role in maintaining peace and stability. Relations with African regional organisations like the African Union (AU) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) become important to strengthen Bangladesh's effective contribution in the UN-mandated peacebuilding operations. Bangladesh can also use these organisations to promote its business interests in those regions.

It is significant for Bangladesh to formulate a national peacekeeping policy to effectively utilise its resources, coordinate the role of different institutions, and fulfil its normative visions in the international forums. Presently, in Bangladesh, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) is preparing a national peacekeeping strategy in collaboration with the military and police. There is a realisation in Bangladesh that the country has to recognise the changing nature of peacekeeping operations and offer its packages accordingly. Now the UN has widened its role and after the completion of peacekeeping in trouble spots often peacebuilding takes over. The country has to prepare its troops for these services too. In this task, the country can also involve the civil service, professionals and the private sector. The country plans to incorporate these aspects into its national peacekeeping strategy.

Concluding Remarks

Peacekeeping operations are an important aspect of Bangladesh's foreign relations. From a small beginning in 1988, the country has now come a long way and makes a major contribution in size and range. The military in Bangladesh however has a unique political nature. It arose like a phoenix out of the fire and ashes of the Liberation War of 1971. The Army has never been fully separated from politics in the post-Liberation period nor is it transformed into an institution fully responsive to civilian authority. Bangladesh so far has not been able to find a proper framework that could govern civil-military relations and delineate a role for the military in Bangladesh society.

Despite these challenges, the political elites, the military, and the citizenry in Bangladesh agree about the peacekeeping role of the Army. This has helped initiate a new phase of civil-military relations in the country. Though there are other factors like the changing composition of the officer corps, the exposure of the armed forces to democratic norms, the rising democratic aspirations of the people and the growth of media which has influenced the orientation of the military and consolidated democracy in the country, the influence of UN peacekeeping on the civil-military relations is the most important one.

In the post-Cold War era, the number of peace operations has increased exponentially because of the end of rivalry between two superpowers. At the same time, the nature of peacekeeping operations is also changing. The global security environment is increasingly becoming challenging and complex because of the changing nature of the conflict. Peace operations are now becoming increasingly complex and use new technologies. The continuously changing pattern of conflict and shifting opinion of security threats are likely to further reshape the peacekeeping landscape. Peacekeeping is now taking the shape of peacemaking and peacebuilding. To meet these new challenges Bangladesh has established new institutions to train people. So far Bangladesh's participation in peace-building is low compared to peacekeeping.

The end of the Cold War meant a change in the structure of international order. For nearly two decades the world became unipolar. Presently, it seems to be changing once again with the rise of China. However, the shape of this impending change in the international order is not yet clear. To meet these challenges the Government of Bangladesh is in the process to formulate a national peacekeeping policy. This peacekeeping policy might help Bangladesh to effectively utilise its resources, coordinate the role of different institutions, and fulfil its normative visions in the international platforms. Bangladesh is likely to adopt a prudent approach to plan for future missions. It is likely to confront and deal with threats in accordance with the emerging contemporary international and domestic political support.

Notes

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6. Humayun Kabir Bhuiyan, “Bangladesh continues leading the way”, *Dhaka Tribune*, 28 May 2020 at <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/foreign-affairs/2020/05/28/bangladesh-continues-leading-the-way>. Accessed on 13 June 2020.

7. Conclusion

The foreign and security policy of Bangladesh to a great extent has revolved around India, just like that of Pakistan. This queer situation exists in the Indian subcontinent despite India helping Bangladesh get independence from Pakistan. In the assessment of the deep state of Bangladesh India remains a “potential threat”. Therefore, it is not surprising that the foreign and defence policy of Bangladesh has been geared to meet this potential threat. It often functions to create constraints for India. At the time of its liberation Bangladesh, unlike Pakistan, could not use one of the superpowers against India by entering into a military alliance because of the prevailing global détente. This made Bangladesh move closer to China. In any case, the Bangladeshi political leaders, bureaucrats and military had been dealing with China when they were part of Pakistan. Thus, it was not difficult to get close to China once Bangladesh achieved recognition as an independent state.

China: A Major Defence Partner

In Bangladesh there is a consensus across the political spectrum over the policy to be adopted towards China. For the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) China has always been a useful counterpoise to India. For Awami League China provides re-insurance. Many Bangladeshi experts think that Bangladesh’s friendship with China makes India go soft on controversial issues like illegal migration. China has an additional advantage of being in close geographical proximity with Bangladesh. There is an understanding in Bangladesh that India and China are going to be comparable powers in Asia with different value systems

and ideological orientation. Theirs will be a perennial rivalry, on which Bangladesh can thrive.

A strong relationship with China was established during General Zia-ur-Rahman's regime. The agreement General Zia signed with China had defense as a key element. This has made China an important defence partner for Bangladesh. After General Zia visited China, it became a kind of informal rule that Bangladesh will buy all its major military hardware from China. For China, this was a win-win situation. It provides a ready market for its military hardware which is much less advanced compared to that of the West. They are often a poor copy of Russian weapons and fighter aircraft. Their export to Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Myanmar has helped the military Industrial complex of China to be established. It also helped China in its defence diplomacy. It increased Chinese influence in South Asian countries and kept India engaged within South Asia.

China is also interested in Bangladesh because it is playing a useful role in the Belt and Road Initiative, the BCIM being part of the programme. The new maritime area which has been handed over to Bangladesh after the ITLOS verdict has created the possibility of energy exports from Bangladesh. China has already signed an agreement with Bangladesh in this regard.

Domestic politics in Bangladesh is confrontational where the two main political parties – the Bangladesh Nationalist Party and the Awami League – are perennially at loggerheads. The major issues facing the country are often decided not in the parliament but on the streets of Bangladesh. Even the policy towards arms procurement shows the nature of domestic politics of Bangladesh. While the BNP wants to procure military hardware only from China, the Awami League wants to source it from China, Russia, and other available suppliers.

Initially, China was reluctant to be drawn into the domestic political issues of the South Asian countries. This made these countries further comfortable in dealing with China. However, the situation has changed now. China has now been seen as interfering in the internal politics of Nepal, Bangladesh and the Maldives.

Unfortunately, its hold over these countries by now is so strong that they are able to do little about it.

No Proper Framework for Civil-Military Relations Constrains Political Leadership

Bangladesh so far has not been able to find a proper framework that could govern civil-military relations and delineate a role for the military in society. The military in Bangladesh has a unique political nature. It arose like a Phoenix out of the fire and the ashes of the Liberation War of 1971. This army has never been fully separate from politics in the post-Liberation period nor has it transformed into an institution fully responsive to civilian authority. The character of the revolutionary *Mukti Bahini* was completely changed when 28,000 Bengali soldiers who were part of the Pakistan Army returned from Pakistan. This army has been involved in several coups and counter-coups. As recently as June 2020 there were some unconfirmed reports of factionalism within the Bangladesh Army.¹

The officers of the Bangladesh Army are not so much divided into ideological as on political lines. Some officers have their loyalties to the Bangladesh Nationalist Party while others are loyal to the Awami League. It is said that they have established these linkages to advance their careers. Some officers could be influenced by Islamist ideology as well. However, the Bangladesh Army is witnessing another change. The previous Pakistan-era officers are gradually retiring and in their place, locally trained officers are taking charge. The army officers are also getting exposed to democratic values because of their participation in the UN peacekeeping operations. The Bangladesh Army is slowly changing but the relationship with the political class remains tricky.

Complex Defence Relationship with India

The defence and security relationship of Bangladesh with India is quite complex. The tricky relationship between the Bangladeshi political class and its military has ensured that the military still takes the final call on defence and security issues. Even though Dhaka and New Delhi presently enjoy a warm relationship, Bangladesh's

geopolitics is defined by its unwillingness to establish a close military-to-military relationship. Hence it often seeks arms from China and nurtures close military ties with Russia and Turkey.

India had helped in the emergence of Bangladesh as a new independent nation when the Pakistan Army began atrocities against the Bengali people. But even at the time of Liberation of East Pakistan, the Jamaat-e-Islami and other religious groups were politically very strong. They had fought against their own people and the Jamaat had polled a large percentage of votes even in the 1971 elections that were held in united Pakistan.² These people were never friends of India and always looked for every opportunity to criticise India and put Mujib and the Awami League on the defensive. They vehemently criticised the India-Bangladesh Friendship Treaty which was seen by many as a defence treaty between the two countries. Due to their opposition, the Treaty was for a long time under suspension or honoured in a breach as Bangladesh for a long time kept hosting and training northeast militants and terrorists. No attempt was made to renew this Treaty when it lapsed.

The main grudge against the Treaty was that it wanted India and Bangladesh to come together to meet the challenge of external aggression. The people who wanted to use China against India were averse to this. In the event of a war between India and China, they did not want to side with India; rather, they wanted to create as much difficulty as possible. They feared that India might ask for the right of passage for its Army to northeast India in the event of a military conflict that could anger their friend China.

Bangladesh signed a comprehensive defence agreement with China in 2002 when BNP leader Khaleda Zia as Prime Minister visited Beijing. Under this agreement, Bangladesh gets its defense supplies from China. Bangladeshis are however reluctant to sign a similar agreement with India. After Dhaka procured two submarines from China which considerably altered the maritime security situation in the Bay of Bengal, India proposed a defence agreement. The Sheikh Hasina Government opted only for an MoU. Given the history of military coups and counter-coups in Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina chose not to sign the defence agreement which may not have

been approved by the military. Though the civil-military relationship in Bangladesh has considerably improved in recent years, the military still remains an important factor in Bangladesh. Defence and military issues are still considered the domain of the military. Hasina chose to play it safe and preferred to go by the military's advice.

At present, Indian exports to Bangladesh consist of ammunition, firearms, and stores produced by the state-owned Ordnance Factory Board. However, the Government of India is very keen to increase the supply of military equipment. It has even offered a US\$ 500 million Line of Credit to Bangladesh. Unfortunately, there is a huge reluctance in Bangladesh to use even this Line of Credit.

Bangladesh's security experts argue that when they go shopping for military equipment, price is not always the overriding factor. They also look at it from the strategic point of view, where China suits their purpose better than India. Some of them chide India for making such an offer and say that, instead, India should use this money to modernise its weapon systems, a good deal of which are obsolete. They also question the standard of Indian weapons and say that how can India, which is itself the largest importer of the weapons, have enough surplus to export to Bangladesh?

Before signing every major deal with Russia, the US or India, Bangladesh is always concerned about China's reaction. In October 2019, India and Bangladesh agreed to install Coastal Surveillance Radar Systems. These radars are already installed in a number of countries in the Indian Ocean region. Some reports indicated that these radars were perhaps being offered as 'gift' to Bangladesh. A section in Bangladesh was resisting even this 'gift'. They were concerned about China's adverse reaction.

Soon after its Liberation Bangladesh embarked on an India-containment strategy. Under this strategy, any accretion of power to India is unwelcome. Initially, Bangladesh pursued the policy of the Indian Ocean being a zone of peace, but this policy was quickly abandoned, as India's growing naval power was seen as a threat. The development of the Andamans as a naval base was frowned upon by both the Chinese as well as the Bangladeshis. Bangladesh wanted other major navies to come to the Indian Ocean to counterbalance

India. Now China is looking towards Bangladesh to help it overcome the Malacca Dilemma. It has already constructed oil and natural gas pipelines linking Myanmar's deepwater port of Kyaukphyu (Sittwe) in the Bay of Bengal with Kunming in China's Yunnan province. Bangladesh could also be used for similar purposes.

After the ITLOS verdict the Bangladesh Navy wants to prepare to safeguard a much larger maritime area. With this objective, the Bangladesh Navy has gone for a huge recapitalisation programme. The Bangladesh Navy now wants to be a three-dimensional force. The most important development in the China-Bangladesh relationship in recent times has been the acquisition of two Ming-class submarines by Bangladesh. Though the submarines are perceived to be outdated, they will help China penetrate the Indian Ocean. This step by Bangladesh has helped China to alter the maritime security environment in the Bay of Bengal.

The two obsolete submarines China has supplied to Bangladesh at a throwaway price serve a purpose. China has charged just US\$ 203 million for the submarines but is getting 1.2 billion to construct the submarine base. It is also training the Bangladeshi submarine crew. China will make a huge profit from the construction contract of the submarine base. And as an icing on the cake, China will use the Bangladeshi submarine base for its submarines whenever required.

The creation of submarine capacity by acquiring two obsolete Ming-Class submarines in the Bangladesh Navy will not help Bangladesh win wars. But it will create an infrastructure that could be used by the Chinese. It might also help Bangladesh create a submarine force in the future with modern submarines as and when their budget permits. Now it will be easier for the Chinese to increase their penetration in the Indian Ocean, a situation to which Bangladesh is not averse. China's engagement with the Bangladeshi and Thai Navies will also constrain India's Andaman naval base.

This Chinese ploy will complicate the Maritime security environment for India in the Bay of Bengal. It will also hinder India's Look East Policy and the operations of the Indian Navy in the South China Sea. Bangladesh in this case seems to be acting as a tool in the hands of China. These acquisitions will not make Bangladesh any

more secure but they will create insecurity for India. Perhaps the deep state of Bangladesh and its military sees security for itself in the insecurity of India.

Massive Military Modernisation to Keep Army Happy

After Sheikh Hasina came to power in 2009 it has been her constant effort to keep the military in good humour. With this objective, a number of major construction projects in Bangladesh were awarded to Bangladesh's military to execute. The armed forces have gone in for massive modernisation under the Forces Goal 2030 programme. The Bangladesh government has increased the defence budget for this purpose. Defence modernisation of the Bangladesh Armed Forces serves many purposes. It helps the Bangladesh military participate in the UN peacekeeping operations. It allows the Bangladesh Navy to protect a much larger maritime area. Most importantly, it keeps the military happy. China has been a major beneficiary of the modernisation programme of the Bangladesh military.

Bangladesh has always been looking to acquire substantial military capability, but so far, it was not able to embark on this trajectory because of the economic constraints. However, nearly two decades of rapid economic growth have provided the country the resources it was looking for. Moreover, because of the increased competition in the international arms market, several countries are willing to offer loans and credit lines. This has allowed Bangladesh to acquire modern military hardware that it was always looking for. Its participation in UN peacekeeping operations has further subsidised these acquisitions. However, in the process, it is also creating new imbalances in the security environment of the region.

Absence of Threat from India Allows Bangladesh send Large Contingent to UNPK

Though the deep state of Bangladesh likes to present India as a threat, in reality, the absence of threat from its larger neighbour India, has allowed Bangladesh to send a large contingent to UN peacekeeping operations. This allows them to procure military equipment for the Bangladesh Army which they otherwise cannot

afford. UN peacekeeping has helped the Bangladesh military modernise as they were exposed to a number of modern technologies while working with troops of other countries. In UN peacekeeping, the participating countries are expected to bring in their weapons and military hardware as the UN operations get more and more complex. The requirement of modern weapons and technologies is increasing. UN peacekeeping is creating a welcome situation for the Bangladesh Army where it is being pushed to acquire modern military hardware and subsequently getting paid for it.

Russia has proved to be an important source for meeting the requirements of Bangladesh troops for UN peacekeeping. Bangladesh has been trying to improve relations after the restoration of democracy in 1990. It has acquired helicopters and military vehicles from Russia where it has an unparalleled advantage. Russia has supplied this equipment to Western countries as well where they are being used. Bangladesh needs them more because they are also useful during UN peacekeeping operations where Bangladesh is a big contributor of troops. By bringing such equipment to UN peacekeeping, Bangladesh gets paid for them.

In 2013, Bangladesh signed an agreement with Russia worth US\$ 1 billion. However, as it has become a norm to go for major military acquisitions from China, the deal with Russia became controversial. There is a strong lobby in Bangladesh which protests whenever a military deal is concluded with any country other than China. But in the case of Russia, they could not indulge, as Russia has been an important source of weapons for Bangladesh after China. Moreover, Russians were willing to give a loan of US\$ 1 billion to Bangladesh to buy these weapons. The pro-China BNP had tried to create similar controversies when Hasina had acquired MiG fighter aircraft from Russia in 1999. Around the same time, Bangladesh also bought a naval ship from South Korea. The ship, when it entered the Bangladesh Navy, was the most sophisticated. The BNP criticised even this deal.

Russia is now interested in strengthening its relationship with Bangladesh because most of its earlier market is not available. Besides, relations with Bangladesh military also allow it to increase its presence in South Asia. A newly-assertive Russia now wants to

present itself as a third alternative in a world where the Chinese are increasingly challenging the dominance of the US. Bangladesh now wants to leverage its defence purchases. By increasing its defence purchases from Russia, Bangladesh wants to send a message to China, which seems to have favoured Myanmar in the case of Rohingya refugees.

Bangladesh has also increased in importance for the US after it adopted its Indo-Pacific strategy to counter China. The United States is now emerging as another important defence partner for Bangladesh. Bangladesh has been interested in importing weapons from the US from the start. But the US initially considered Bangladesh as a low-priority area. Bangladesh was geographically located far away from the important shipping lanes of the Indian Ocean. The US was not interested in the arms supply relationship with Bangladesh as it was already active with Pakistan. It wanted Bangladesh to buy weapons on commercial lines for which Bangladesh had little resources. The US was interested in establishing a military base in Bangladesh for which Bangladesh was not ready.

The US-Bangladesh military partnership progressed after Bangladesh took part in the Gulf War under US leadership. Since then the US has been regularly engaging Bangladesh in military exercises. The importance of Bangladesh has however increased in recent times after China emerged as a major power and began challenging the dominance of the US. The Indo-Pacific has now become an area of priority for the US. It is now conducting regular military exercises with the navies of the region. The Bangladesh Navy is one of them.

The US is also providing naval patrol boats to Bangladesh under its Excess Defense Articles (EDA) Programme. Bangladesh however, wants more advanced weapons, helicopters, and fighter planes from the US. The US is ready to help the Bangladesh military modernize under its Forces Goal 2030 Programme. But before that the US wants Bangladesh to sign two foundational agreements that will ensure that the US and Bangladesh have similar security interests and Bangladesh will not share the technology given to it with others especially China. Moreover, given the defence budget of Bangladesh, the perception in the US is that, to have a greater military equipment

partnership, the US will have to offer loans or grants to Bangladesh. Bangladesh is already getting such a facility from Russia and China. Bangladesh is in discussion with the US on the foundational agreements but its dependence on the US is less, as it gets similar military hardware from Europe, without the requirement of signing any agreement.

Need to Modernise India's Defence Industrial Complex

To make India a major exporter of the military equipment there is a need to modernise India's defence-industrial complex. When India is itself the second-largest importer of military equipment then it makes prospective buyers skeptical about importing Indian weapon systems. India's model of funding countries like Afghanistan to buy weapons from Russia is not very attractive. It tried to do the same even with Bangladesh, but with little success.

To improve the relationship between the security forces, India and Bangladesh have started joint exercises. But this has not worked to the desired extent because of the hesitant approach prevalent within the security establishment in Bangladesh. While at the political level, India and Bangladesh are enjoying their best relationship, to achieve the same success at the military level both sides have to put in some more effort. India is no longer the enemy in the war games of the Bangladesh Army, but this change should also start showing in the bilateral relationship of the armed forces of the two countries for a greater defence and security cooperation to materialise. This will only happen when both countries have similar defence and security interests.

Notes

- 1 Subir Bhaumik, "A crack in the hornets' nest: Strife within Bangladesh military order", *The Telegraph*, 10 June 2020 at <https://www.telegraphindia.com/opinion/a-crack-in-the-hornets-nest-bangladesh-military-tussle/cid/1779697>. Accessed on 10 January 2021.
- 2 "Bangladesh Govt publishes list of Pakistan collaborators during 1971 Liberation War", International News, News Services Division, All India Radio, 15 December 2019 at <http://www.newsonair.com/News?title=Bangladesh-govt-publishes-list-of-Pakistan-collaborators-during-1971-Liberation-War&cid=376132>. Accessed on 10 June 2020.

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A state's security is heavily dependent upon its geopolitical environment. The geopolitical setting of South Asia changed in 1971 with the birth of Bangladesh as a new, independent nation. India already faces a hostile neighbour on its western border. In the north, China is a major threat. In this geopolitical setting the kind of relationship India has developed with Bangladesh becomes important.

The military coup of August 1975 in Bangladesh marked a major shift in the way the country perceived its foreign and defence policies. India, its supporter in the liberation war, was now presented as the main threat to national security. A country's defence policy and defence-related procurements depend on the threat perception of that country. Bangladesh, despite being a poor country, has tried to acquire significant defence capability mainly due to its perceived sense of insecurity and to some extent to participate in the United Nations peacekeeping operations. Some of the steps taken by Bangladesh purportedly to enhance its own security have meant that the security environment in the region has actually deteriorated. In this context Bangladesh's security relationship with other major powers has significant implications for Indian security, and the book tries to throw light on it.



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