

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 BTĐ 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 BTĐ 279.1 billion for “non-development expenditure” and BTĐ 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.

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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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