

## **STRATEGIC INTEREST OF GREAT POWERS IN MYANMAR: POLICY OPTIONS FOR BANGLADESH**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Myanmar is a country of 58 million people and located in between South and Southeast Asia. The geo-strategic and geo-economic importance of Myanmar plays an important role in bilateral relation with her neighbours and extra-regional powers too. The existing bilateral relation of Myanmar with China, India and Bangladesh varies in terms of mutual cooperation. China is a longtime friend of Myanmar while India's interest with Myanmar acts as a minimal counter balance to China. Bangladesh-Myanmar relation has not been on a uniform track since 1991. It has experienced up and down trajectory on many contentious issues. Rohingya refugee repatriation, trade imbalance, connectivity, energy cooperation etc dominate bilateral dialogues between Bangladesh and Myanmar. Recent initiation of political reforms in Myanmar has drawn attention of all great powers including the EU, India and Japan too. After President Thein Sein assumed power in 2011 within less than three years of time leaders of the USA, the UK, Russia, France, China, Japan, the EU and UN Secretary General Ban Ki Mon visited Myanmar. It appears that the US and her ally EU are not ready to miss the opportunity of engaging Myanmar just for the sake of absolute reform. Rather the USA wants to reach her arm to Southeast Asia to counter absolute dominance of China in the Indian Ocean (Saran, 2011). A trend of competing interest centering Myanmar among the USA, China, Russia and India driven by their desire to share the profit of geo-economic interest is on the rise Myanmar's effort to embrace more closely with global economy has given rise to international competition for influence and access to country's natural resources (Ratner, 2013). Bangladesh encounters such competing situation compounding her existing bilateral tensions with Myanmar. Taking all these factors into consideration Bangladesh faces a dilemma as to whether her interest in Myanmar is at risk or offers new opportunity in choosing foreign policy options.

This study is intended to examine possible policy options available for Bangladesh to adopt bilateral and multilateral approaches in establishing strategic relation with Myanmar. The study also examines whether dynamics of great powers interest in Myanmar is affecting Bangladesh in the promotion of trade and commerce. The study examines whether Myanmar is a national security concern for Bangladesh. Finally the paper presents a set of long and short term policy options in the form of recommendations.

## **MYANMAR'S FOREIGN POLICY AND IMPLICATIONS FOR OUTSIDE WORLD**

### **Guiding Principles of Myanmar's Foreign Policy**

Myanmar adopted a neutral and independent foreign policy after regaining her independence from British Colony (Maing, 2006). In 1974 on the question of neutrality Myanmar left the British Commonwealth and adopted a neutral and non-aligned foreign policy and continued until 1989 and rejoined again in 1992. During the cold war period, due to indifferent attitude towards bi-polar power blocks Myanmar could neither align herself with capitalist nor the communist bloc. But Myanmar's effort to introduce "Myanmar way of Socialism" in 1959 was regarded by the Western as a pro-communist while the socialist block termed as pseudo socialist country (Min, 1989, p.42). Until the end of cold war, Myanmar proved herself as 'everybody's friend but nobody's ally' (Min, 1989, p.41). Myanmar's such close door policy coupled with repeated military intervention in politics eventually led to self-imposed seclusion. After military takeover by the SPDC, the ruling junta transformed Independent and Non-aligned Foreign Policy to Independent and Active Foreign Policy ([www.mofa.mynmar](http://www.mofa.mynmar)) in pursuant to her national causes, socio-economic and political objectives (Myanmar Facts and Figures 2002). In post millennium era Myanmar started facing new reality of dominance of US and her allies' in the internal affairs of other countries which made Myanmar realized that today she has to become either an ally or an opponent to the international institutions (Min, 1989, p.42).

The purpose of Myanmar's foreign-policy is to respond to, manage and influence the country's external environment and to promote the domestic goals. Myanmar's national security policy is intended to avoid, prevent and manipulate the dangers both from the internal and external threats on its political, military and economic affairs.

### **Key Determinants of Foreign Policy Objectives**

**Geo-Strategic Importance.** Myanmar lies on the cross-roads of two of the world's great civilization China and India. The Asian Highway routes link Myanmar to China, India and Thailand and provide access to Yangon port. And, this makes Myanmar a strategic land bridge linking the South and Southeast Asia. As a littoral of the Indian Ocean, Myanmar's strategic value further increases. Its 1,930 km long coastline dominates the eastern arch of the Bay of Bengal, leaning on to the Malacca Strait.

At critical times in the past, Myanmar has been a cockpit for rivalry between the colonial powers in the nineteenth century. In the twentieth century the super powers contested there for influence. It is Myanmar where Allied forces contested Japanese military which ultimately accelerated surrender of Axis forces' in East Asia during World War II (WW II database). Today the rise of China and India together with the reengagement of the U.S. in the region is drawing increasing attention from analysts and

officials (Seth 2001, p5). Primarily, it is the location of Myanmar and its huge natural resources which attract interest of neighbours and distant foreign powers in developing economic and political ties with Myanmar.

**Politico- security Imperative.** The present military backed Thein Sein's government has been following the foreign policy objectives framed on the basis of few key national, political and economic objectives as her foreign policy imperatives (Thant et al, 2002). Two key elements of the politico-security imperative are national unity and sovereignty. It was intended for the then SPDC government's continuation of military in state-building work and eventually transition of power to the civilian government with wider participation of armed forces in the governance (Haacke, 2006). The Myanmar's current constitution was adopted in 2008 which paved the way for the entry of the armed forces in the executive (Ahmed, 1996, p.142). As part of independent and active foreign policy Myanmar is embracing to international community, receiving economic investment and greater diplomatic cover (Steinberg, 2013). So does Myanmar's economic and diplomatic association with ASEAN and BIMSTEC.

**Democratic Reforms – A Necessity.** President Sein is optimistic of and thinks that political reform will allow the country to gain wider diplomatic acceptance beyond the region and bring economic benefits for the country (The Guardian, 20 May, 2013). America and her EU allies, Australia and Japan have already started lifting sanctions against Myanmar following democratic reforms. Japan has made a noteworthy move to waive off 6.6 billion dollar Myanmar's external debts and on top of which , offer of funding assistance for latter's socio-economic development projects (The Financial Times, 28 January, 2013). The eventual end result will be an open Myanmar which is integrated within the international community after decades of isolation.

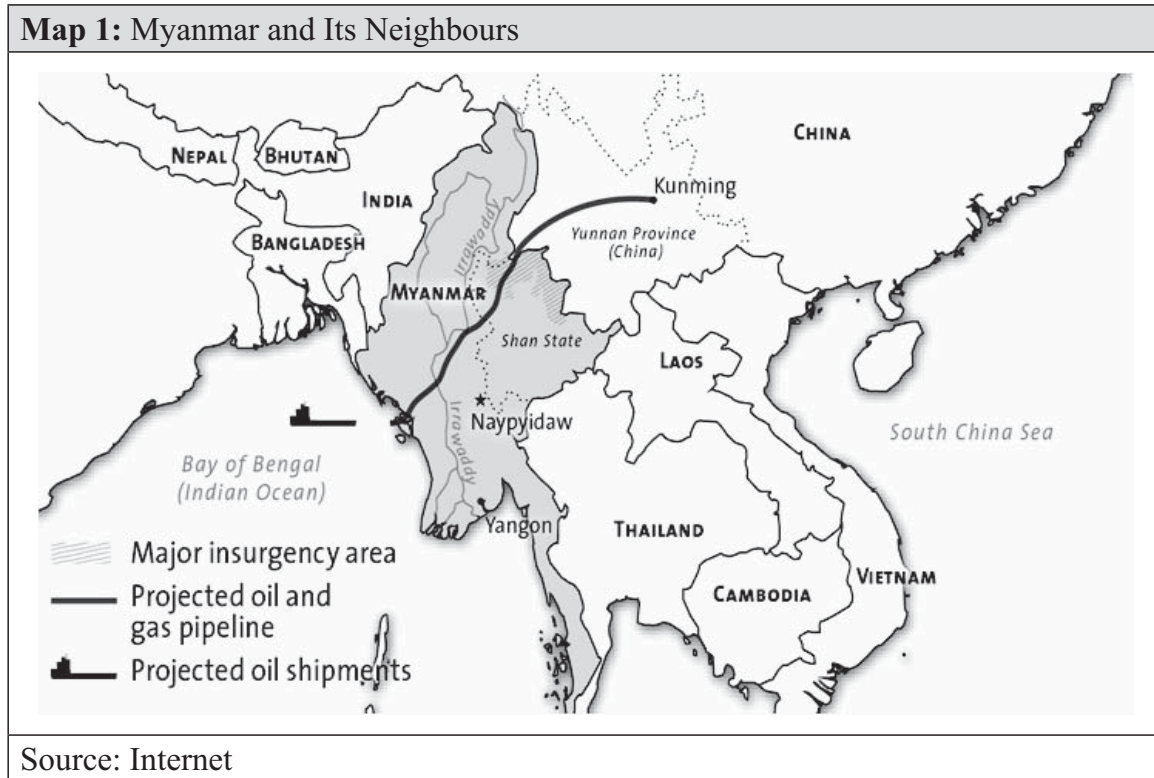
## **Great Powers' Strategic Interest in Myanmar and Prospects of Multilateral Strategic Cooperation**

### **China's Strategic Interest in Myanmar**

Xigwang considers Myanmar as the pivot of China's grand strategy on many accounts for its economic growth and to achieve its goal of becoming a great power in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (The Global Times, Nov 29, 2011). China has three principal strategic interests in Myanmar: (1) energy procurement and energy security, (2) access to the Indian Ocean, and (3) security of the border areas and border trade.

**Energy Procurement and Energy Security.** China aims to reduce her vulnerability of shipping transportation through narrow Malacca Strait. To achieve this objective a pipeline for crude oil transportation is being laid parallel to the natural-gas pipeline. Currently, a deep-sea port is under construction in Mayday Island near Kyaukpyu; the plan is to transport crude oil, which is carried by tankers from the Middle East and

Africa to Myanmar, through a pipeline to the Yunnan Province in China bypassing the Straits of Malacca (Fink, 2001, p.249).



**Access to the Indian Ocean.** For the landlocked Yunnan terrain, securing access to the Indian Ocean through Myanmar as a land bridge is important for acquisition of trading routes as well as for security. The concept of using Myanmar as a land bridge is part of China's two-ocean strategy to gain access to both the Pacific and the Indian Ocean (Malik, 1997). China would be interested to reduce its sea lanes vulnerability of Malacca Strait by establishing her dominance in Indian Ocean.

**Border Trade and Security in Border Areas.** The third strategic interest is the securing of border trade routes and the stability of the border regions. Realist diplomacy has been utilized by China to realize its own strategic benefits, such as security in the border regions, securing of friendly neighboring countries, and energy security (Pedersen, 2000, p.253). Myanmar is Yunnan Province's biggest trading partner. The China-Myanmar border trade is also a Myanmar's logistical artery.

### US and EU's Strategic Interest in Myanmar

The US Department of Defence Strategic Guidance 2012 document rationalizes its policy shift and pronounced that the US, will of necessity rebalance towards the Asia-Pacific and its engagement in Myanmar forms part of US's Asia-Pivot strategy. Strategic

interest of the US and her allies in Myanmar is founded on three basic imperatives; counter Chinese growing dominance in the Indian Ocean and its effort to extend influence in the Bay of Bengal, the strategic location of Myanmar and its enormous economic potentials (Jackson, 2012) and to expand allies in her effort to counter terrorism in the Southeast and the East Asia. It encompasses as a step to decade long project upon which the US will build substantial economic, diplomatic, cultural and military initiatives (Ratner, 2013).

There are also other strategic benefits for the U.S. in growing closer ties with Myanmar. Primarily, the improvement in relations is an opportunity to separate Myanmar from its previous allies of North Korea and China. US's tie with Myanmar will deprive North Korea of cash and further isolate the regime. Secondly, engagement with Myanmar will allow the EU and America's big multinational companies in deriving benefits from the huge potentials of mineral resources of Myanmar.

### **India's Strategic Interest in Myanmar**

Myanmar is of extreme strategic and economic importance for India. The two nations share a 1,600 km land border and a long maritime boundary in the strategically important Bay of Bengal and Andaman Sea. India adopted a "Look East" policy in 1991 to promote economic development in the Northeast states and began initiatives to develop closer economic ties with Myanmar (Steinberg, 2012, p.160). Today, India is keen to purchase natural gas from Myanmar and has become one of the key nations that Myanmar uses to balance its relations with China.

The elimination of long running insurgencies in the northeastern states of India is not possible without the proactive cooperation of Bangladesh and Myanmar. With Myanmar having a large coastal line, India's strategic interests in the Indian Ocean and the Bay of Bengal as well as the security of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands is also linked to sustained good ties with Myanmar ( Kapila, 2001).

### **Russia's Strategic Interest in Myanmar**

Russia's strategic interest in Myanmar is driven by arms deal and economic gain. In fact Russia places high premium on integration into global economic pipeline and geo-economic considerations in seeking strategic interest (Nadkarni, 2010, p.154). Such strategic interest was revealed from the statement of Russian foreign minister in October 2012 during his visit to Myanmar. During the visit Russia agreed to expand ties in investment in energy, mining, capacity building and science and technology. In the past decade Russia supplied Myanmar with military hardware of worth 130 million US\$ in 2007. There are reports in the international media that Russia has struck a secret nuclear research centre deal with Myanmar in 2007. (BBC, 15 May, 2007).



## **Prospects of Multilateral Strategic Partnership with Myanmar and Role of Bangladesh**

The prospects of multilateral partnership between Bangladesh and Myanmar with the inclusion of great powers cannot be over ruled. The US seeks to balance other great powers by maintaining alliances with fellow democracies around the world (Survival, 2012, p.15). In South and Southeast Asia, Bangladesh and Myanmar are the two neighbours with which China and the USA would prefer forging partnership to contain each other's influence in the region (Datta, 2008). Great powers existing bilateral strategic partnerships in the region are: Indo-US, Indo-Russia, Sino-India and Sino-Myanmar strategic cooperative partnership. Following discussion examines the prospect of inclusion of Bangladesh and Myanmar in the above mentioned partnerships to forge trilateral cooperative partnership.

Among all the above, the Indo-US strategic partnership is founded on strong bilateral needs. Following various political and strategic development in the international and regional security environment like the emergence of China being a potential threat to India's security, its preponderance of nuclear weapon, military might and growing influence in the Indian Ocean has led to the establishment of strategic partnership between India and the US (Panjath, p.100, 2007). Given the fact that both India and U.S. have strategic interest in Myanmar as discussed before and Myanmar too needs them, a trilateral partnership among the trio is not unlikely. Myanmar needs India as a counter balance to China and US's support to avert further economic and political sanction (Ratner, 2013).

Indo-Russia strategic partnership is time tested and has been playing a significant role in the spheres of security and development. Russia and India have their own strategic interest in Myanmar. Both the countries want to derive benefit from energy and mineral resources of Myanmar (Sharma, 2012). As Bangladesh and India have similar economic interest in Myanmar the probability of forging cooperative partnership between India, Russia and Myanmar with the inclusion of Bangladesh is very remote. On the other hand cooperative partnership between Bangladesh, Myanmar and Russia in harnessing economic potentials of Myanmar would be preferred by Russia as the later needs to sell its investment proceeds in Myanmar to Bangladesh.

China-Myanmar Comprehensive Cooperative Strategic partnership was established in 2011. The joint statement issued on 27 May 2011 stated the goals of partnership. These are: to maintain high level contacts, enhance trade and commerce and the favourable condition for investment, cooperation in education, science and technology, health, tourism, border management cooperation, timely communication of border affairs and better coordination in the UN and other multilateral forums. Unless a strong bilateral relation is established with Myanmar, forging cooperative partnership with China and Myanmar would be difficult for Bangladesh (Interview Muniruzzaman, 2013).

Resistance from Myanmar and India would be a serious challenge for Bangladesh as both are comfortable with the present status.

A new reality is emerging amid all the hype about Myanmar's moves to liberalize its political landscape. Meanwhile bilateral trade framework agreement has been signed between Myanmar and the US signaling a strategic partnership is looming large. US President Barack Obama's administration has made Myanmar one of its top foreign policy priorities. Trade and other exchanges are being encouraged.

Proximity of Bangladesh and Myanmar and huge untapped on and off shore minerals of Myanmar offer excellent opportunity of drawing long-term strategic cooperation. Technologically both are in dire need of foreign investment in the field of energy and connectivity. Presumably this need can be met easily if trilateral cooperation is established. Bangladesh can enter into two trilateral strategic dialogues leading to strategic partnership. The first one comprises Bangladesh-Myanmar-U.S. and the other one among Bangladesh-China-Myanmar. Such dialogue will explore the areas of cooperation in the field of energy, connectivity and trade leading to trilateral strategic cooperative partnership. At least it is being echoed by the policy makers at Washington (Clinton, 2012). Mozena (2013) and Muniruzzaman (Interview, 2013) subscribed the idea of such partnership.

## **BANGLADESH AND MYANMAR RELATION: PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES**

### **Historical Context of Bangladesh-Myanmar Relation**

The present discord between Bangladesh and Myanmar relation is deep rooted. The Arakan state came under British rule as a result of the first Anglo-Burmese War (1824-1826) which laid the foundation for close economic and social interaction between the old Chittagong Division of Bengal in British India (now in Bangladesh) and the Arakan region of Burma (Britannica, 1997, p.462). This event strongly conditions the dynamics of Bangladesh-Myanmar relations to this very day. Till today Myanmar is too cautious about economic migration from neighboring Bangladesh (Min, 1989). It is known that a delegation of Arakan Muslims traveled to Karachi on the eve of Partition (1947) to inform Mohammed Ali Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan to indicate their preference to join the new State (Chan, 2005). Myanmar thinks such aspirations may flare up among Arakanese in future.

### **Current Bangladesh-Myanmar Relation**

**General.** In the post-independence era relation between Bangladesh and Myanmar started from zenith of amity and after 1975 reached to nadir of suspicion and non-cooperation. Burma accorded recognition of Bangladesh on 13 Jan 1972(Wikipedia).

Relation further improved following opening of embassy in Rangoon in 1973 and Burma's President Ne Win's first state visit to Dhaka in 1974. After 1975, relation between the two countries started deteriorating. There are few irritants which contribute to the unease relations between the two states until today.

**Rohingya Refugee Issue.** The first crack in bilateral relation occurred in 1978 when first plight of approximately 300,000 Rohingya refugees living in Arakan state entered Bangladesh (Kiragu, Rosi and Morris, 2011). Under international pressure Myanmar agreed to take back the refugee and signed an agreement in July 1979. By the end of 1979 repatriation of Rohingya refugee was completed.

Again in 1984 approximately 250,000 refugees entered in Bangladesh. According to UNHCR report until 2011 there were 29106 registered and approximately 200,000 unregistered stateless Rohingya refugee stranded in Bangladesh causing serious socio-economic and humanitarian burden for her (2011). Rohingya Muslim minority people are treated as stateless and Myanmar's denial of existence of Rohingya ethnic race making the whole issue complex (Than, 2013).

### Trade and Economic Relations

Bilateral trade between Bangladesh and Myanmar is limited to few items and it occurs through informal means along the porous border. Experts believe that volume of trade between the two countries is much less than the potentials. Inadequate banking facility, limited amount of consignment (Maximum 50,000 US \$ in one consignment), no shipping transportation, complicated visa procedures are the major bottlenecks in trade promotion (EPB Brief 2013). It is alleged that due to Myanmar's reluctance Bangladesh could not resolve all these problems. Table 1 gives a comparative picture of the trade relations between Bangladesh and Myanmar.

<b>Table 1: Bangladesh- Myanmar Balance of Trade (In million US\$)</b>			
FY	Export	Import	Balance
2007-2008	9.58	114.59	(-) 105.05
2008-2009	9.17	66.65	(-) 57.48
2009-2010	10.04	69.65	(-) 59.62
2010-2011	9.65	179.40	(-) 169.75
2011-2012	13.45	65.00	(-) 51.55
Source: Bangladesh Export Promotion Bureau			



### **Maritime Security and Extraction of Maritime Resources**

Maritime dispute had been a major source of irritation in bilateral relationship until recent past. Although the dispute has been settled through ITLOS verdict in 2012, Bangladesh is yet to derive benefit of huge gas and mineral resources of the EEZ. After 2008 naval standoff, Myanmar Navy again entered the Naf River in July 2013. Besides all these problems, the ongoing piracy in the Bay of Bengal causes serious hindrance to free navigation of merchant ships, fishing trawlers etc. Bangladesh cannot explore full potential of her marine resource unless mutual cooperation between Myanmar and Bangladesh is achieved.

### **Energy and Transport Connectivity**

Bangladesh is an energy hungry country. The existing gas reserve is not enough to meet the development challenge and likely to deplete by 2016. Electricity demand is likely to rise to 13993MW by 2020(Ahmed et al. 2005). A framework of tri-nation gas pipe line agreement from Myanmar through Bangladesh up to West Bengal of India was signed in 2004. Later Myanmar declined to sell gas to Bangladesh and proposed laying pipeline bypassing Bangladesh. In the same token the proposed road network through Myanmar up to Kunming commonly known as Kunming initiative within the framework of the BCIM not yet materialized. Experts believe that transport connectivity can create trade integration between Bangladesh and ASEAN to a great extent.

### **Prospects and Challenges of Bangladesh –Myanmar Relation**

Although Bangladesh pursues policy of peaceful coexistence with her neighbours, one should not be oblivious of the risks to peace and stability in the border. Therefore, Bangladesh should take account of factors that could create threats to her national security while pursuing a friendly policy toward Myanmar. Only good relationship with Myanmar will allow Bangladesh to promote her business in that region. Bangladesh's geographical proximity to Southeast Asia gives her the unique opportunity to connect two major regional forums; SAARC and ASEAN.

Bangladesh and Myanmar emerges heavily in the strategic calculus of great powers. Bangladesh and Myanmar are equally important to the USA and China to keep both the countries away from their counterparts. In the case of Bangladesh whether to align with the USA or China is a serious challenge for the foreign policy makers. It is for own interest Bangladesh cannot effort to be used by the great powers in their race to contain each other in this region. Zaman suggests that Bangladesh should balance her relations with China and the USA very carefully without causing resentment to either of the party as both are important for Bangladesh's economic development (Interview Zaman, 2013).

Aung San Suu Kyi, the much prospective future democratic leader of Myanmar is likely to play key role in Bangladesh-Myanmar relation. Though she is less interested in supporting rights and citizenship of Rohingyas; in the long run leadership stature of her famous for the cause of democracy and human rights will not allow her to adopt policy of repression against Rohingyas (Interview, Zaman 2013). Therefore importance of Suu Kyi for developing strategic relation with Myanmar should not lose sight of the foreign office at Dhaka.

## **IMPLICATIONS OF GREAT POWERS' STRATEGIC INTEREST IN MYANMAR AND POLICY OPTIONS FOR BANGLADESH**

**General.** Great powers strategic interest and their increasing alienation towards Myanmar have far reaching impact on Bangladesh. Each of the great power has definite strategic goals in Myanmar. A close examination of great powers strategic interest in Myanmar would reveal how Bangladesh is affected and probability of convergence of two or more powers with Bangladesh.

### **Security Implications**

Being under economic sanction and isolation from the US and Western world for more than two decades Myanmar was able to establish links with North Korea and Russia for nuclear cooperation. A nuclear Myanmar, however, could have an adverse effect on regional security and stability. US administration is very much concerned about Myanmar's secret link with North Korea and thinks that it would be destabilizing for the region and would pose a direct threat to Burma's neighbours as US Secretary of State noted during her visit to Myanmar (Murdough, 2011).

The Sino-Myanmar strategic partnership has profound impact on security of Bangladesh and Bangladesh should not lose sight of it. Average annual defense expenditure of Myanmar has been increasing since 1988. Its defence budget is 2.2 billion dollar in the current fiscal year and almost doubles that of Bangladesh (Military Balance, 2012,p.268). In terms of active combat personnel though parity exists in Air and Navy, Myanmar's land force is three times of Bangladesh Army. Myanmar has achieved numerical superiority in critical armaments, combat air craft and warships too. Table 2 shows comparative military strength of Myanmar and Bangladesh.

### **Strategic Balance and its Implications**

Myanmar is a long time beneficiary of China's diplomatic credentials. In any eventuality whether China will use its veto power to rescue Myanmar is subject to Bangladesh's relative strategic value to China vis-à-vis Myanmar and to the degree of involvement of the US in the conflict. Strategic analysts believe that China acknowledges the strategic significance of Bangladesh. In the end China may end up being a peace broker between Bangladesh and Myanmar to prevent a conflict or to prevent the escalation of a conflict to ensure its neutrality (Interview, Muniruzzaman 2013).

**Table 2: Military Balance between Bangladesh and Myanmar**

	Bangladesh	Myanmar
Total Army Strength	1,26,153	375,000
Total Main Battle Tank	232	160
Armored Fighting Vehicle(AFV)/Light Tanks	8	105
Total Armored Personnel Carrier (APCs)	248	361
Self-Propelled Artillery	-	30
Towed Artillery	343	264
Multi Barrel Rocket Launchers(MBRLs)	-	30
Mortars	472	80
Anti-Aircraft(AA ) Guns	164	46
Anti Tank Weapons	238	1000
Total Air Force Strength	14,000	15,000
Total Combat Aircraft	74	136
Fighter/Ground Attack	48	69
Fighter	29	58
Transport Aircraft	7	19
Total Helicopters	23	66
Total Navy Strength	16,900	16,000
Frigates	5	1
Petrol and Coastal Combatants	42	99
Mine Warfare Ship	5	
Amphibious Ship	11	18
Logistic and Support Ship	11	18
Naval Aviation Helicopter	2	-
Naval Infantry	-	800

Source: The Military Balance 2012

In any conflict between Bangladesh and Myanmar, the USA is not likely to side with Bangladesh. During liberation war of Bangladesh in 1971 the USA took opposing side. In 2008 when Bangladesh and Myanmar reached to the brink of open hostility on maritime dispute, the USA preferred neutral position. However if the USA finds a great strategic stake in Bangladesh and China takes side with Myanmar, the USA is likely to take side of Bangladesh (Interview Muniruzzaman, 2013).

India is also seeking to cultivate deep economic and defence relations with Myanmar to counterbalance Chinese influence in Myanmar for its own strategic advantage.

Policymakers of New Delhi are aware of strategic importance of Bangladesh for the security of Northeast India. So overtly, India may seek neutrality but covertly may extend support to Myanmar to put Bangladesh in a disadvantageous position so as to force Bangladesh to grant concessions in some vital outstanding issues such as maritime border demarcation, action against northeast insurgents, and transit rights through roads and water ways etc (Interview Zaman, 2013).

## **POLICY OPTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The challenges Bangladesh faces with Myanmar are complex and multi-dimensional. The issues dealt in this study require actions on different tracks at bilateral, regional and international levels. Some of the recommended long, medium and short term policy options available to Bangladesh are as following:

- a. Bangladesh needs to chart out well defined strategic vision and foreign policy objectives to secure her interest in Myanmar. Bangladesh should demonstrate political will to cooperate with Myanmar on the basis of mutual benefit. Future track of bilateral cooperation has to be so sculpted as to guarantee a win-win and sustainable scenario. As Myanmar is a very close and opaque society, foreign policy experts at Dhaka needs to allocate more resources to pursue and study Myanmar more intimately.
- b. Bangladesh needs to bolster its soft diplomacy with Myanmar. Regular exchange of youth program, offering scholarship in different disciplines, citizen dialogues between civil society members, regular flag showing visit and joint military exercise etc will build trust and mutual confidence. Maritime security cooperation between the two countries and establishment of a maritime institute for regular exchange of program is a necessity (Interview Ahmed, 2013).
- c. Bilateral trade and investment framework between Bangladesh and Myanmar should be expanded to great extent so as to reduce trade imbalance. Joint Trade Commission should be established and interaction at secretary level should be held at regular interval.
- d. Bangladesh should make all out effort to forge strategic cooperative partnership with Myanmar with the inclusion of the USA and China separately. Possible areas of such cooperative partnership are energy, connectivity, deep sea port building, maritime security, oil and minerals exploration at sea, disaster management etc.
- e. Establishment of BIMSTEC FTA should be expedited. Within the BIMSTEC framework Myanmar will act as a land bridge between South Asia and ASEAN if greater connectivity is established within the member states. As a result Bangladesh's trade integration with ASEAN will increase substantially.
- f. Taking advantage of the consensus between India and China, Bangladesh should take the initiative of promoting Regional Economic Growth Quadrangle within

the BCIM. Further, the concept of growth zone comprising northeastern India, Bangladesh and Myanmar will generate increased economic activities at deep sea port of Bangladesh.

- g. As a long term strategic goal Bangladesh should strive to be the member of ASEAN. Process may start with forging strategic partnership with ASEAN leading to summit level partner and ultimately become ASEAN+4 member.
- h. Bangladesh should maintain warm relation with Myanmar's much contemplated future leader Aung San Suu Kyi who is likely to steer the country in the democratic path in near future. A democratic Myanmar will pay more dividend to Bangladesh than military backed government like the present one.
- i. Bangladesh should remain continuously engaged with great powers to check secret nuclear and missile development of Myanmar. At the same time it should ensure balanced development of her armed forces to ensure credible deterrence.
- j. On matters of Rohingya refugee issue, Bangladesh should remain deeply engaged with the USA, the EU, the UNHCR and the OIC.

## CONCLUSION

Besides struggling with contentious bilateral issues with Myanmar, as of today Bangladesh faces a new reality of great powers rivalry in siding with Myanmar. What will be the fate of Myanmar as India, China, Russia and USA nudge together in Myanmar is a contemporary issue in the South Asia and the Southeast Asia. Amidst growing interest of great powers in Myanmar and for internal politico-economic needs; Myanmar government has been keen to reorient its relations with her neighbours and other extra regional powers.

Strategic interest of great powers are colliding each other in Myanmar. Entry of the USA and India in Myanmar is going to challenge China's long term vision of two ocean policy. By doing so the USA forces China to remain vulnerable to narrow sea lanes of the Malacca Strait. India on the other hand would be able to deny China's access to her northeastern border and consolidate her position in the Indian Ocean. Net result of this competing environment is deprivation of China's strategic and energy stake in Myanmar. Russia's assertion for access to rich mineral resources of Myanmar is not going to be at the cost of her long term ties with India. Japan, South Korea and ASEAN are the dominant players in the region. Japan and South Korea's alignment with the USA would go a long way in favour of the USA. ASEAN as a regional forum by default of its policy of constructive engagement is not going to hurt Myanmar.

The great powers interest in Myanmar is a reality. Realists warn of a new Great Game and rising conflict between China on one side and India and the USA on other side. While the liberals see greater cooperation is on the rise as the BCIM and BIMSTEC are



gaining institutional shape. Myanmar wants to balance her relation with all great powers. It serves dual purpose for Myanmar. First, it safeguards the sovereignty of the country and secondly it enhances greater acceptance of the regime outside Myanmar. Both Bangladesh and Myanmar are the desired partners of great powers. But as a sovereign nation both have to craft their foreign policy objectives carefully without antagonizing the great powers. After all for the sake of national interest Bangladesh cannot afford to be used in the China containment policy of India and the USA.

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