BANGLADESH NATIONAL SECURITY OUTLOOK IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Major General Md Abdur Rouf, OSP, ndc, afwc, psc (retd)
Former Faculty Member of National Defence College, Mirpur, Dhaka, Bangladesh

Abstract: The essence of Bangladesh's security paradigm originates from the national core values, i.e. democracy, nationalism, socialism, and secularism. Contemporary geostrategic trends together with global pandemic have led the complex web of systematic factors, both of international and regional nature, influence Bangladesh's national security in one way or other. Bangladesh, to encounter the multifarious security challenges at global, regional, and domestic levels, needs to adopt concept of comprehensive security that would give her the strategic space to play its own role in all situations. From a national perspective, Bangladesh's security is contingent on political security, military security, economic security, social security, environmental security, and global peace. Bangladesh needs to attain socio-political stability by creating a society in which the rule of law, fundamental human rights and freedom, equality and justice will be secured for all citizens. An integrated effort is necessary to preserve sovereignty and safeguard territorial integrity by protecting national land, maritime and air spaces, and national cohesion. Bangladesh needs to achieve sustainable and inclusive economic growth to survive in the global economic recession due to pandemic and trade war. As a disaster-prone country, it is essential for Bangladesh to develop a healthy and sustainable environment. Following the foreign policy postulated by the Father of the Nation, Bangladesh is committed to maintain global peace. This paper attempts to focus on the conceptual issues relating to national security of Bangladesh relevance to global, regional, and domestic, geopolitical, and geostrategic environment. The paper is based on data from the constitution, books, government websites, journals, internet and news reports, attempts to assess contemporary security issues of Bangladesh, at a time when the country is facing the challenges of the 21st century.

Keywords: *National Security, National Core Values, Socio Political Stability, Sovereignty and Territorial Integrity, Sustainable Economic Growth, Environmental Protection and Global Peace.*

PREAMBLE

Security is valued by individuals, families, states, and other actors. Security, however, is not the only thing they value; and the pursuit of security necessitates the sacrifice of other values. Modern concepts of national security arose in the 17th century during the thirty years' war in Europe and the civil war in England. In 1648, the "Peace of Westphalia" established the idea that the nation-state had sovereign control not only of domestic affairs such as religion, but also of external security (*Patton, 2019*). The idea of the nation-state is commonplace today, yet it would be wrong to assume that it is the only way to look at international security. It would be far better to have an international system based on the equilibrium of nation-states dedicated to the limited purposes of national sovereignty and self-defence. The realist school of thought professed by Thomas Hobbs (1588-1679) in his book "Leviathan", espoused the supremacy of the nation-state (*Hobbes, 1651*). However, in the 18th century this idea was challenged by idealist school of thought by philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), in his essay "Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch," outlined his idea that the system of nation-states should be replaced by a new enlightened world order (*Kant, 1795*). Nation-states should subordinate their national interests to the common good and be ruled by international law (*Kant, 1795*). Thus, was born the secular view of supranational institutions governing international affairs, which today is reflected in the global world view of liberal internationalism and most clearly manifested in the United Nations (UN).

National security is the requirement to maintain the survival of the state using economic power, diplomacy, power projection and political power. Contemporary geostrategic trends had led the complex web of systematic factors, both of international and regional nature, influence Bangladesh's national security in one way or other (*Karim, 2006*). In the face of such challenges, Bangladesh is indeed constrained to act independently on its own. The constraint emanates not only from the confinement of state authority within the national boundary, but as well from the resource endowment that Bangladesh as a small and developing state lacks. Bangladesh is scarce to accommodate the demographic pressure and it lacks adequate strategic depth. The land-man ratio in Bangladesh is critical, therefore the question of food security and political stability are of contextual importance here. Country's mineral and energy resource is meagre to facilitate her economic growth. The country lags in connectivity, which constrains its trade and investment (*Rahmatullah, 2009*). Further, it is prone to natural disaster and susceptible to global climatic changes. Bangladesh became a nation much before it became a state and had to endure strenuous tests of national will and cohesion to emerge as an independent country (*Hussain, 2013*). Since independence, Bangladesh has made important strides forward in several fields of national life. However, the country is also facing number of challenges from within and without, which must be addressed to ensure the national security of Bangladesh. Conceptualizing security at levels other than the nation-state is not new. The

new thinking about security focuses on conceptual issues rather than empirical or normative issues. This paper attempts to focus on the conceptual issues relating to national security of Bangladesh relevance to global, regional, and domestic, geopolitical, and geostrategic environment.

STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT

The world in the 21st century is undergoing fundamental transformations, and has become more complex, fast-changing, and hyper-connected. Globalisation is flattening the world by blurring geographical boundaries and increasing connectivity, and thus enhancing mobility of people, goods, thoughts and of infectious diseases (*Fischer, 2003*). The coronavirus pandemic, which was first detected in China, has infected people in 188 countries. Its spread has left businesses around the world counting costs and wondering what recovery could look like. It has affected big shifts in stock markets, where shares in companies are bought and sold, which affect the value of pensions or individual savings accounts (ISAs). Many people have lost their jobs or seen their incomes cut due to the coronavirus crisis. Unemployment rates have increased across major economies as a result. According to international monetary fund (IMF) the global economy will shrink by 3% this year due to pervading effect of coronavirus. It described the decline as the worst since the great depression of the 1930s. The travel industry has been badly damaged, with airlines cutting flights and customers cancelling business trips and holidays. Many countries introduced travel restrictions to try to contain the virus. The crude oil price had already been affected by a row between Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Eountries (OPEC), the group of oil producers, and Russia. Coronavirus drove the price down further. Retail footfall also saw unprecedented lows as shoppers stayed at home in a bid to stop the spread of Covid-19. However, governments around the world have pledged billions of dollars for a Covid-19 vaccine and treatment options (*Jones, Palumbo, & Brown, 2020*).

Globalisation has quickened the pace of developments for many around the globe but has also deepened and widened inequality. Despite significant progress in attaining the Millennium Development Goal (MDG), poverty has remained one of the greatest concerns of human security (*Shangquan, 2000*). Consequently, migration has become an ever-increasing global phenomenon. Cultural fusions have created new identities and offered new challenges to the old ones, and eventually fomented ethno-religious intolerance. There is inequality also in respect to causes and effects of the emerging environmental challenges: most of those who have contributed the least to environmental degradation are perhaps the ones least prepared to handle its effects (*Mir, Qadri & Hassan, 2015*). New technologies are revolutionising social behaviour, ideas, norms, and practices. Technology has alleviated much of human vulnerabilities but has also introduced newer ones. Besides, developmental needs have

increased the global appetite for energy. Connectivity on the other hand is reshaping the knowledge-base and facilitating formation of global opinions, faster and wider (*Akhtar, 2014*). People's demand to the state is also undergoing transformation: people around the globe are gradually forcing states to put 'Human' at the centre of all concerns and actions.

As people's behaviour and aspirations are undergoing changes, so are the concerns of the states and the norms of international relationships. While the roles of the major global powers are gradually changing, new powers are emerging fast on the global platform, and shifting the balance of power between the West and the East, and the North and the South. The re-emergence of geopolitical rivalries is signalling tectonic shifts in the international relations and raising concerns about inter-state conflicts and weapons of mass destruction (WMD) (*McGlinchey, Walters, & Scheinpflug, 2017*). Rise of a wide range of non-state actors, on the other hand, is challenging and undermining the role of the state, since globalisation has undermined the capacity of states to address security challenges on their own; while strife, terrorism, unrest, radicalisation, and a host of transnational organised crimes are defining the new range of conflicts in the modern world. 'Networks' in such a complex and complicated world has gained centrality in significance: while epistemic networks may foster the creation of norms, covered networks can engage in illicit activities, ranging from terrorism to the smuggling of nuclear know-how and materials (*Falkner, 2011*). The world today as such is not only just interconnected but also intertwined and interdependent for both progressing developments and mitigating vulnerabilities.

South Asia is a developing region in the fastest developing continent of the contemporary world. Although South Asia is not amongst the best connected or integrated regions of the world, most of the countries in the region share common history, culture, ethnicity, and values, and also important socio-economic concerns; some of which are competitive while most are complementary (*Thakur and Wiggen, 2004*). Geographically, South Asia lies at the crossroads of West, Central and East Asia and the Indian Ocean, and has the potential to offer connectivity to these regions. The region also has some natural and huge human resources to offer to the world. But there exist diverged and contentious interests in the region which lead to geopolitical rivalries to the extent of nuclear empowerment and increased arms race, and involve interests of other global powers (*Snedden, 2016*). This adds some tension to the regional stability and impedes/limits regional cooperation and integration. Economically, South Asia in general consists largely of agrarian economies with increasingly private-sector-led engagement in low-end and labour-intensive manufacturing, and in the fastest-growing service sector. Socio-politically also, South Asia is not the most stable regions of the world. The most important concerns for almost all the countries in the region are the ones related to human security. Although the South Asian countries have performed relatively well in achieving the MDGs, a significant part of the population has

limited access to food, shelter and safe drinking water, and the states also face significant challenges in delivering services (*Bajpai & Sachs, 2004*). For many countries in South Asia, the internal concerns weigh higher than the external ones on the balance of security.

Bangladesh being located in between two very important regions of the globe, i.e., South Asia and South-East Asia, is considered as bridge between them. Since Bangladesh is the only flat territory between East-Southeast and West-Southwest, regions in respect to her location, therefore her geostrategic significance is very high (*Karim, 2008*). Bangladesh is considered the gateway to Bay of Bengal with its 45000 square miles of sea territory. This stretch of water gives Bangladesh an opening to the Indian Ocean and through its choke point i.e., the Strait of Malacca to the Pacific Ocean, thereby to the Asia Pacific Region. Consequently, Asia Pacific region, Indian Ocean region, South Asia and South-East Asia directly or indirectly impinge on the geo-strategic disposition of Bangladesh (*Hussain, 2006*). Bangladesh is the 8th largest and homogeneous nation of the world, which amounts to huge demographic strength. Average 65% working age provides large capacity of active manpower. Its population is resilient and hardworking to withstand any adverse situation and cope with any situation. There has been remarkable women empowerment and gender equality in all walks of life (*GED, 2015b*). Unlike many other countries, it is blessed with common language amongst majority of the population, absence of class in the society, and sound communal harmony. Bangladesh's national will has proved to be a strong force behind any national cause. This spirit of the nation provides an intrinsic strategic strength of the country. There has been number of innovations over the time since independence in the field social and economic activities, which are considered as strategic soft power of the country (*Barai & Adhikary, 2015*). Bangladesh's persistent commitment to United Nations Peace Keeping Operations (UNPKO), lauded by the entire world, has provided diplomatic defence in its favour. Apart from diplomatic dividend, UN assignment has enabled Bangladeshi peacekeepers to expose and educate in global crisis environment (*Zaman & Biswas, 2015*). This cumulative knowledge over the years has contributed to grow expertise in international and domestic crisis management.

BANGLADESH'S SECURITY ARCHITECTURE

National security is a state or condition where most cherished values and beliefs, democratic way of life, institutions of governance and unity, welfare and well-being as a nation and people are permanently protected and continuously enhanced (*Afolabi, 2015*). Needless to state, every region has its own distinct security environment defined by its geopolitical, geo-economic and geostrategic positions. The complicity of geopolitics and wide variety of security issues which encompass the region today demand a holistic approach towards national

security. Such ideas have resulted in the evolution of modern concepts of security like collective, common, comprehensive, and cooperative security (*Kikkwa, 2010*). The fundamental basis of collective security is the idea of all against one (*Kara, 2018*). Common security is underpinned by the assumption that security is best assured through cooperation rather than competitive power politics. Comprehensive security recognises that military power, in itself, is not sufficient to guarantee a nation's security. Cooperative security emphasises the importance of pursuing a multi-dimensional approach to security (*Dewit, 1994*).

To secure national interest of Bangladesh, its security is contingent on comprehensive security paradigm. Bangladesh, to encounter the multifarious security challenges at global, regional, and domestic levels need to adopt concept of comprehensive security that would give her the strategic space to play its own role in all situations. Comprehensive security architecture provides a holistic view of security, as it encompasses multidimensional nature of threat that emanates from both within and outside the border. The concept is most widely used and most effective mechanism for managing bilateral disputes between the neighbours. It is suitable for dealing with non-military and non-traditional security issues involving two or more nations of the region (*Schmid, 2007*). Further, it allows the nations to cooperate with states, as well as non-state actors and allow integration of extra-regional powers in a broad area of cooperation. Finally, adoption of comprehensive security would enable Bangladesh to get the support of extra-regional powers and other regional partners.

FOUNDATION OF BANGLADESH'S SECURITY PARADIGM

The essence of Bangladesh's security paradigm originates from the national core values, i.e. democracy, nationalism, socialism, and secularism. These core values render national aim to realize the democratic process for a socialist society, which is free from exploitation, a society in which the rule of law, fundamental human rights and freedom, equality and justice, political economic and social rights are secured for all citizens. Following national aim, the national objective is to prosper in freedom and make our full contribution towards international peace and cooperation in keeping with the progressive aspirations of mankind (*Ministry of Law, 2009*). With these, national vision of Bangladesh is to emerge as a regionally and globally influential middle-income country, with a democratic, secular, and inclusive identity, contributing to global peace, progress, and prosperity (*GED, 2015a*). Aspiration of national vision raises the wants and need of the nation i.e. national interest of Bangladesh, which broadly includes:

- Sovereignty, territorial integrity, political and economic independence, and maintenance of identity.
- Strengthening democracy, rule of law and good governance.

- Protecting and projecting national image and identity as a secular, growing democracy.
- Seeking economic emancipation, self-reliance, and social security.
- Management and sharing of scarce national resources.
- Combat the challenges of climate change and its adverse impacts.
- Seeking to consolidate good international relations.
- Playing an active role as a responsible and contributing member of the international community.

NATIONAL SECURITY CONCERN OF BANGLADESH

Elements of Bangladesh national security include sovereignty and territorial integrity, socio-political stability, economic prosperity, environmental protection and global peace and stability. As a member of UN, Bangladesh is committed to global peace and security, which provides her diplomatic defence. For Bangladesh, each element of security is manifested with relevant security concern. Geostrategic location and national power of Bangladesh impinges on its territorial security and sovereignty (*Karim, 2006*). Its security mostly defines traditional threats that include both external and internal which challenges the nation state system. External threats posed by state actors while internal threats originate from transnational and internal terrorism including religious extremism. Border security of Bangladesh entails mainly border management, which is concerned with trans-national organised crimes (trafficking-arms, drugs, human, smuggling and money laundering). It also includes existing border disputes concerning demarcation (*Das, 2008*). Illegal migration is a growing concern for Bangladesh and presently the country maintains the largest refugee camp in the world. Maritime boundary delimitation enables Bangladesh to possess huge maritime space, which raises its increased security concern. Rising tension in the Indian Ocean together with global and regional maritime interest in the Bay of Bengal engenders Bangladesh's freedom action in its exclusive economic zone (EEZ) and maintenance of sea line of communications (SLOC) at all times (*Rahman, 2014*). Security of maritime resources in the EEZ, illegal fishing, sea piracy, trafficking and migration are also growing concern of Bangladesh.

Political culture, governance, law and order and human rights are key constituents of political security in Bangladesh. Here, political intolerance raises social tension besides democratic institutions are yet to mature (*Andaleeb, 2007*). Want of good governance, inadequate enforcement rule of law and weak social capital lags accountability to the state. Ethno-religious aspiration, unequal access to services (justice, education, health, food, and shelter), lack of employment opportunities is major concern for Bangladesh's social security (*Miazi and Islam, 2012*). Other growing social concerns are community security (road accident,

fire hazard, drowning, food adulteration etc.), pandemics, public health hazard, urban migration, cultural invasion and abuse of cyberspace in creating social or individual discontent, as well as in misusing services. Although Bangladesh has seen a delayed appearance of coronavirus with the first identified case on 8th March 2020, by now it has impacted on ready-made garments (RMG), remittances, consumer goods, small business and start-ups including challenges to financial sectors (Amit, 2020). Further, national security is hugely influenced by societal impacts. It mainly involves gender discrimination, violence against women, drug abuse and exploitation of rights of wage earners at home and abroad (*Sehgal, 2011*).

Economic prosperity in Bangladesh can be assessed in terms of the condition of having stable income or other resources to support a standard of living now and in the foreseeable future. Threats to economic security in the context of Bangladesh emanate from both internal and external sources. The internal insecurity comes mainly from massive poverty and the external ones emanate mainly from the process of globalisation, more specifically, from the effects of the global financial crisis out of trade war and recent pandemic (*CPD IRBD 2020 Team, 2020*). Bangladesh is a developing country with inadequate resources. Its resource constraints concern wider gap between demand and supply of water sources (trans-border and inland surface and subsurface), predicted shortfall of energy sources (coal, hydrocarbon, hydropower, gasoline and renewable energy) and unpredicted shortfall of energy resources (*SREDA and Power Division, 2015*). Though Bangladesh is a food sufficient country, with the rise of population and reduction of cultivable land predicted/ unpredicted shortfall of food productivity is a growing concern for food security in Bangladesh. Despite having demographic dividend, insufficient human resource development is a major concern for Bangladesh. Global recession indirectly impacts Bangladesh economy as it mainly affects RMG and overseas remittance. Present meagre domestic investment (DI) together with foreign direct investment (FDI) inflow put constrain in growth of gross domestic product (GDP) (*BIDA, 2019*). There are difficulties related to access to international market due to imposed generalised system of preferences (GSP), tariff and non-tariff barrier. Further Bangladesh lacks in integration with Asian and global value chain. Inflation remains a constant headache for growing economy like Bangladesh. Increased competitive market, inadequate infrastructure, technological incompetency, non-compliance constrains economic growth of Bangladesh. Inadequate protection of consumer's rights and lack of legal expertise in dealing with international financial dispute are also growing concern for Bangladesh economic security (*Huq et al., 2017*).

Bangladesh is among the world's most vulnerable countries to both natural and man-made disasters. Over the last three decades, disasters have killed huge people in Bangladesh and inflicted colossal financial damages. The importance of environmental protection is not only confined to manmade and natural

disasters but also reflected on issues of environmental degradation and sustainability. Bangladesh as a country is characterized by extremely high environmental stress resulting from floods, scarcity of water in dry season, growing urban population density, energy shortages, deforestation, and air pollution (*Hossain, 2011*). Climate change is expected to exacerbate the existing vulnerabilities in Bangladesh, leading to the further depletion of scarce food and water resources, augmenting migration, and increasing the number of internally displaced people. Ecological security concern includes unplanned urbanization, environmental pollution due to poor waste management, natural disaster like cyclone, fold, tidal surge, tsunami, earthquake, drought, flood etc. Deforestation due to population growth and soil erosion and siltation is a regular challenge for ecological balance in Bangladesh. Bangladesh is susceptible to global climate change through sea level rise, increase salinity in river water, changing suitability of soil and crop pattern (*Mahmood, 2012*).

RECOMMENDATIONS

From a national perspective, Bangladesh's security is contingent on political security, military security, economic security, social security, environmental security, and global peace. Taking these into considerations following recommendations are made:

- The political institutions of Bangladesh need to attain socio-political stability by creating a balanced society that upholds the aspirations of citizens in which the rule of law, fundamental human rights and freedom, equality, and justice- political, economic, and social - will be secured for all citizens.
- There should be an integrated approach by civil and military to preserve sovereignty and safeguard territorial integrity by protecting national land, maritime and air spaces, and national cohesion, from threats emanating from within or without, so that the nation can prosper in freedom and interact with the world on the basis of equality and mutual respect.
- To face the challenges out of global economic recession, the financial stakeholders of the country should strive to achieve sustainable and inclusive economic growth requisite by creating an efficient, robust, resilient, attractive, enabling, and innovative economy.
- Being one of the most environmentally vulnerable countries, government and non-government organisations of Bangladesh can endeavour to develop a healthy and sustainable environment, which is adaptable to climate change, capable to reduce risks and mitigate impacts emanating from disaster.
- Following the principles of foreign policy and as a leading peace keeping member of UN, Bangladesh armed forces should continue to

contribute towards international peace and cooperation in keeping with the progressive aspirations of mankind.

CONCLUSION

Bangladesh is a small state but a large nation. It is worth saving Bangladesh. Since independence, the country is emerging from the least developed country (LDC) to a middle-income country despite global financial crisis, trade war, pandemic, rise of non-state actors, natural and manmade disaster through resilience, innovation, and national will. The geostrategic location of Bangladesh necessitates coercive diplomacy with credible deterrence and cooperation through a balance of power. Bangladesh as an emerging economy owns both huge potential demographic dividend, which needs to be protected and equally enormous challenges within and without, which needs to be addressed timely. The world is changing every day in the sphere of political power play through emergence of new forms of challenges like pandemic, geopolitical alignment, political culture, democracy, economy, and media. To keep pace with these transformations, Bangladesh needs to have an adaptive and integrated security outlook with optimal utilization of national power, multilateral diplomacy with smart power and good governance to secure national interest.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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AUTHOR

Major General Md Abdur Rouf, OSP, ndc, afwc, psc (retd) was commissioned on 19th May 1985 in the corps of engineers. He has attended several professional courses both at home and abroad. He is a graduate of Defence Services Command and Staff College and National Defence College, Bangladesh. He obtained Bachelor of Science degree from Chittagong University. He also did undergraduate and post graduate engineering from Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology. He attained Masters in Defence Studies from National University of Bangladesh. The officer also acquired Masters in War Studies and MPhil in Security Studies from Bangladesh University of Professionals. Presently he is pursuing PhD in Social Science at Bangladesh University of Professionals. Major General Rouf had mix of all three types of appointment available in the Army i.e. Staff, Instructor and Command. He commanded an operational unit in Chittagong Hill Tracts and a Composite Brigade. As a staff he served as General Staff Officer Grade-1 at National Defence College and Chief of Doctrine Division at Army Training and Doctrine Command. He was Directing Staff in School of Military Engineering, Defence Services Command and Staff College, Military Institute of Science and Technology and twice in National Defence College at Armed Forces War Course Wing. Major General Rouf actively took part in Counter Insurgency Operation in Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh and Participated in two UN assignments in the capacity of Contingent Commander and Staff at Force Headquarters. Major General Rouf has been actively involved in drafting Bangladesh Defence Policy during his service at NDC, DSCSC and ARTDOC since 2007. He contributed positively to shape the policy from 1st draft to 7th draft with a span of 11 years and as recognition of this effort has been awarded OSP. The author actively participated in Tokyo Defence Forum as representative of the Government of People's Republic of Bangladesh and he has publication in Security Studies at NDC Journal and Book published by United Nations University, Japan on Environmental Engineering.

E-mail: *rouf830@yahoo.com; abdur2756@gmail.com*