

## **NATIONAL SECURITY OF BANGLADESH: CHALLENGES AND OPTIONS**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Security is a matter of both perception and reality. The security outlook of a nation is built up largely on how and where it perceives the threats to her security are coming from. Other things that go into shaping a nation's security perspective are its geo-strategic and geo-political environment. It is necessary to recognize that this security notion may be defined not merely as a goal but as a consequence. In some sense, therefore, security is defined and valorized by the threats, which challenge it.<sup>1</sup> This concept usually undergoes transformation with the march of time. The world has witnessed in silence substantial change in threat perception since the end of the Cold War.

Traditional security concerns have now given way to a comprehensive approach to security. Four main types of threats have been identified: territorial, economic, political and environmental threats. Contrary to conventional wisdom, the end of the Cold War did not lessen the chance of war; in fact we have seen more of them, mostly in the form of proxy war to enforce national objectives. Nevertheless, the preponderance of national security preoccupations differ from the stand point of the physical security of the state from the perspective of both internal and external threats.<sup>2</sup>

It is clear that security in the post-Cold War era can no more be understood in terms of only military threats emanating from across the border. Barry Buzan has suggested that there are primarily five major sources of threats to any nation-state's national interest, namely, military, political, economic, social and environmental, though these are not in ascending order of importance.<sup>3</sup> The inadequacy of the traditional state, territory and military-centric definition of security in capturing the current existential concerns of states, societies, groups and individuals is now well-recognized. An esoteric mix of violent and non-violent

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1. Sean M Lynn - Jones and Steven E Miller, ed, 'Global Dangers - Changing Dimension of International Security', The MIT Press, London, 1995, p.19
  2. Brigadier General M Sakhawat Hussain, 'National Security in South Asian Perspective', The Daily Independent, 14 September 2001.
  3. Barry Buzan, New Pattern of Global Security in the Twenty - First Century, International Affairs, Vol 67, No 3, RIIA, London, 1991, Pp.431-451

issues is also considered to be newer issues of security. So, in a bid to grapple squarely with the newer issues, the recent preoccupation is to emphasize non-traditional security (NTS) discourse.<sup>4</sup>

Internal and external security threats make Bangladesh quite vulnerable. Bangladesh should always keep in mind its neighbours and the ongoing nuclear proliferation in the region while reviewing her external threats. The primacy of the internal dynamism of security is even more pressing today in Bangladesh.

In current security discourse, both internal and external non-traditional threats must be emphasized. The level and nature of threat to national security of Bangladesh has changed over time. This transformation of the concept of security basically denotes a broad shift of concept from a traditional 'state and military' centric concept to the 'people' centric security concept. However, one should guard against overexpansion of the concept of security and have not to legitimize the levels of analysis below the nation-state level, because, such broadening of the concept may render it less useful as an analytical tool.

National security of Bangladesh should be viewed as a 'comprehensive security' to encompass both traditional and non-traditional threats. The paper deals with the concept of security. It attempts to identify the various changes in the source, level and nature of threat, challenges and vulnerabilities impinging on the security of Bangladesh and likely to do so in the near future. The paper finally goes on to highlight and discuss various options essential for maintaining, strengthening and enhancing the national security of Bangladesh.

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4. Dr. Abdur Rob Khan, "Non-Traditional Security in Bangladesh in the New Millennium", Draft Paper, Presented at a Seminar in BIIS, 29 March, 2005, p.2

## **TOWARDS UNDERSTANDING NATIONAL SECURITY**

### **General**

The fundamentals of national security perception should be the recognition that security issues can no longer be treated accommodating to a 'conventional warfare' framework. National security is now a holistic concept, entailing dealing with non-conventional and asymmetric threats and subject to interpretation in an ever-shifting context of human relations at different levels and with varying manifestations. The notion of security, thus, must be related to new perspectives of threat perception, vulnerability and reality.

### **Reconceptualisation or Redefining National Security**

Till recently, the dominant security discourse i.e. state-and-regime-centric and threat-based, had been concerned with the geo-political and military formulations of security in terms of spatial exclusion of threats by military means and ensuring a stable political order internally.<sup>5</sup> Such was the focus of the international academic community, at least since the start of the Cold War. All other dimensions of security were relegated to the background, and only threats projected primarily from external sources were accorded primacy in the security calculus of states.

In the aftermath of the Cold War, there were many calls for adopting a new conception of security and revisioning the traditional concept. The international commission on Global Governance recommended in 1995 that Global security must be extended from its traditional focus on the security of states to the security of people and the planet.<sup>6</sup> Clinton administration officials repeatedly referred to extended or 'human' security' and including a new understanding of national security and the role of individuals and nations-states. R B J Walker, for example, writes, "It is scarcely possible to involve the term of security without sensing something is dreadfully wrong with the way we live."<sup>7</sup> Walter Lippmann declares "a nation is secure to the extent to which it is not in danger of having to sacrifice its core values, if it wishes to avoid war, and is able, if challenged, to maintain them by such a victory in such a war".<sup>8</sup> The apparent 'vagueness' of Lippmann's reference to core value is explained by Talukdar Maniruzzaman when he writes that "by security, we mean protection and preservation of minimum core values of any nation: political independence and territorial integrity."<sup>9</sup>

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5. Kabir, Mohammad Humayun, 'National Security of Bangladesh in the Twenty - First Century', Academic Press and Publishers Limited, Dhaka, June 2000, p.1
  6. Miller, Benjamin, 'The Concept of Security : Should it be Redefined', The Journal of Strategic Studies, Vol. 24, No.2, June 2001, p.13
  7. R B J Walker, 'Security, Sovereignty and the Challenges of World Politics', Alternatives, XV (1990), Pp.3-27
  8. Walter Lippmann, "US Foreign Policy : Shield of the Republic", Little Brown, Boston, 1943, p.51
  9. Talukdar Maniruzzaman, "The Security of Small States in the Third World", Canberra Paper on Strategy and Defence, No-25, Canberra, Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, Australian National University, Canberra, 1982, p.15

The Realist school of international relations refused to conceptualise the ways in which internal politics shape and direct the foreign policy agenda, on the grounds that they are irrelevant to any specific outcome. Recently, however, it has been noted that the state-centric geopolitical approach to international relations is inadequate for conceptualising the third world security environment. Buzan has also noted the tendency in the past to treat ‘third world national security problems as a mere extension of systemic level dynamic’, that is, as a function of superpower or great power rivalry without any reference to the alignment of domestic forces.<sup>10</sup>

Among scholars Richard Ullman has advocated an extension of security concept to include a wide range of threats from natural disaster and diseases to environmental degradation. Such advocacy became more prominent with the end of US-Soviet rivalry when other threats, notably environmental ones and those directed at human well-being, have been seen to increase in recent decades. “Our national security today depends on things like balance of payments, economic affairs, foreign assistance.....”,<sup>11</sup> in a statement made to the US Congress in 1972, the then Deputy Assistant Secretary of States for Public Affairs observed.

The diverse philosophies of security raises the following questions: firstly, are new conceptions and extensions necessary or is the traditional concept the right way to address the security issue? Secondly, are the re-definitions useful or do they carry a heavy burden to our understanding of security? Certainly, it will be appropriate to define national security as a notion of security that stresses a feeling of being free from fear. Security, generally appears to represent a universal good that all in society strive to achieve. Therefore, the dynamics of security lies in both state-centric and human security.

The transformation of the concept of security over time, referred to as “Temporal Evaluation of National Security Concept” is appended below: <sup>12</sup>

Pre-Industrial Revolution	Industrial Age	Post Cold War Era
Broad Reliance on	Narrow Reliance on	Broad Reliance on
* Food (Economics)	*Soldier	*Industrial Strength (Economics)
*Nature (Environment)	(for security)	*Resources (Environment)
*Soldier (for security)		*Soldiers/Weapon for security.

10. B. Buzan, ‘States, People, Fear’ in Edward E Azar and Chung In Moon (eds), National Security in the Third World, Pinter, London, 1988, Pp.14-43

11. Quoted in Hussein Solomon, “From Marginalised to Dominant Discourse : Reflections on the Evolution of New Security Thinking” in ISS Mongraph Series, No.20, February 1998.

12. Robert Mandel, “The Change Face of National Security - A Conceptual Analysis”, Greenwood Press, UK, 1998, p.10

Therefore, while the political will and energy of a state are focused on military solutions, the non-military tasks are likely to grow ever more difficult to accomplish and will be dangerous to neglect. At this stage, it will be pertinent to introduce the concept of comprehensive security that readily brings out the tensions and contradictions between state security and human or societal security into sharp focus.

### **Traditional Concept of Security**

Traditionalists tend to see security either as derived from power or as a consequence of peace, in the sense that lasting peace will bring security for every one.<sup>13</sup> Due to the many threats that states have traditionally faced to their values and independence in an anarchic international environment, the concept of security has long been a key concept in international relations. Anarchy, resulting from the absence of a supreme reliable law enforcement agency, may encourage wars among states. Traditional conceptions of security have undergone criticism, these being more militaristic. The concept of traditional security should now be expanded to include diverse non-military strategies for reducing security threats. These alternative strategies should be made to contribute to national security and not dismissed as counterproductive.

### **Shift from Realism to Neo-realism**

Until recently, the concept of security was exclusively oriented to power and prioritized military security. The shift from this 'realist' view to 'neo-realism' encompasses first, security as protection of state boundaries and second, security as a psychological state or freedom from fear. Both these aspects represent the bedrock of security.

### **Post-Cold War Concept: Three Tier Security and Paradigm Shift in Security Arena**

The end of the Cold War raised questions about the utility and relevance of conventional notions of security that were based on military preparedness or power. A three-tier post-Cold War security mechanism was proposed. The first tier would deal with the traditional security, the second with macro-security debates concerning trans-border military capabilities and the third with micro-security notions involving a complex mix of national, international and trans-national forces, the prevailing focus being on economic gain, environmental and feminine or gender concerns. Since the Stockholm conference of 1972 and the founding of the United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP), there has been a major paradigm shift emphasizing both environment and development.<sup>14</sup>

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13. Samiruddin, Rumana, "Non-Military Security of Bangladesh", University Press Limited, Dhaka, 1996, p.31

14. Kalam, Abul, Lecture on 'National Security of Bangladesh: Multilevel Perspective' in DSCSC, 05 February 1998.

With the emergence of a sustainable development paradigm, the concept of non-military or non-traditional threats have emerged in the arena of security.

### **Non-Traditional Concept of Security**

The concept of national security has also undergone major changes in the United States (US). US national security experts have called for strengthening American military power to thwart any perceived Soviet military threat. A number of studies have demonstrated that chronic internal politics and economic instability in newly independent Third World countries pose a serious threat to America's core values, the independence and sovereignty. The post Cold War era professed a more progressive approach on security issue to include both traditional and non-traditional aspects which later on got crystallized as the Comprehensive Conception of Security (CCS).

### **Conceptual Components of National Security**

Robert Mandel explains the conceptual components of national security through two communication filters, an information filter and a perception filter which ultimately relies on internal capabilities, external threats and alliances. These components of national security appear to possess general applicability.<sup>15</sup> Another scholar has identified the following five components of national security: first, economic progress and prosperity of a country; second, national cohesion; third, political stability; fourth, a viable defense infrastructure; and finally, good relation with neighbours, which can serve the national interest. He argued that when all these five components can be achieved, an ideal scenario would be in place as far as the national security of a country is concerned.<sup>16</sup>

### **National Security and its Scope: Bangladesh Context**

Bangladesh faces wide ranging military and non-military threats of serious magnitude. Barry Buzan has noted that any state has the array of threats to tackle. He divides these into five distinct but interdependent sectors, namely military, economic, environmental, political and societal.<sup>17</sup> The inputs to insecurity of Bangladesh at the primary level are three-fold: size, underdevelopment and dependency and geo-political and geo-strategic location which interact to produce secondary level inputs : vulnerabilities and external/internal threats, both military and non-military. This, in turn, constitutes the elements of insecurity of small states at the critical level.

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15. Mandel, op cit, p.27

16. Vice Admiral (Retd) I F Quadir, 'Security of Pakistan : Internal and External', National Development and Security, Quarterly Journal, Vol. V, No 2, November 1996, Rawalpindi, Pp. 165-166

17. Barry Buzan, op. cit, Pp. 19-20

Bangladesh will be said to have assured its own security only when it becomes economically and technologically developed, politically stable and socio-culturally cohesive. Security, therefore, has become a multidimensional concept. Robert McNamara, former US Defense Secretary offered a definition of security that is more relevant to a country like Bangladesh when he said that security is development and without development there can be no security. In the Bangladesh context, internal cohesion and human security are inevitable preconditions for enduring security though the military aspects of security cannot be-emphasized.

## **CHALLENGES TO NATIONAL SECURITY OF BANGLADESH- TRADITIONAL THREATS**

### **General**

Bangladesh is still a ‘soft state’ and its existential realities are intertwined with development and traditional security issues. The spectrum of traditional security has to be strengthened for Bangladesh’s survival. The traditional threat to Bangladesh is most likely to emanate from neighbouring India or Myanmar. By balancing and managing its neighbours, Bangladesh should resolve the dynamics of its traditional security challenges.

### **Geo-Strategic Environment of Bangladesh**

Geo-strategically, Bangladesh’s importance is on the rise with the passage of time. It has both constraints to face and opportunities to take advantage of as far as geopolitics is concerned. Huntington argues that after US and the next layer of six major powers, India is currently the predominant emerging power in the South Asian sub-system. China, major player in this region has made India to adopt the “Look East” policy as part of the Gujral Doctrine.



Bangladesh lies at the crossroads of South Asia, South-east Asia, Central Asia and the passage along the Indian Ocean. It has many unresolved bilateral issues with India and Myanmar. China, India and Pakistan's massive military modernization, including nuclearization and even the modest military modernization of Myanmar, are also matters of interest and concern for Bangladesh.<sup>18</sup> General Krishna Rao has projected Bangladesh as a potential military threat, though not a serious one to India. He has predicted that Bangladesh may be instigated to side with China by capturing the Siliguri Corridor or Silchar in the event of a Chinese offensive against India.<sup>19</sup> On the other hand, Bangladesh is 'India Locked', and the passage through the Bay of Bengal can be completely blocked by any mighty naval armada. Alleged Bangladeshi exodus to India could be a catalyst for a war-like situation. India's desire for a direct thoroughfare through the normal land route of Bangladesh and need to use Chittagong land port, the "seven sister" issue and the insurgency problem in Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) have also the potential to erupt into a conflict.

Myanmar shares a common boundary with Bangladesh of about 176 miles. This traditionally friendly neighbour has demonstrated its military preparedness in the recent past on the Rohingya refugee issue and may pose a military threat to Bangladesh in the not-too-distant a future.

Due to its geo-strategic importance, Bangladesh still holds the trump card in bargaining with likely adversaries, though it is not a strong and credible one. Any alliance of Bangladesh with a regional or extra-regional power unfriendly to India is likely to threaten Indian dominance in the Indian Ocean and also endanger the Shiliguri Corridor.

## **TRADITIONAL SECURITY THREATS TO BANGLADESH**

Traditional security threats to Bangladesh emanate from its immediate geographical vicinity, that is to say, its big neighbour India that encircles her from three sides and also to some extent Myanmar.

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18. Mohd Aminul Karim, "Geostrategic Environment of Bangladesh", ed in Contemporary Security Issues in the Asia-Pacific and Bangladesh', Academic Press and Publishers Library, Dhaka, December 2006, Pp. 173-177

19. Rao, General K U Krishna, "Prepare or Perish" - A Study of National Security, Lancer Publishers, New Delhi, 1991, p.387 and 406.



## **The India Factor**

**General.** India, by virtue of its geo-strategic location, size, resources, technological and industrial base, military capability and preparedness and the other attributes it possesses of a regional power occupies a position from which it can dictate terms in the subcontinent. The India factor is now a dominant element of internal and foreign policy formulations of all South Asian states.

**Indian Foreign Policy and Security Perceptions.** Indian foreign policy is basically based on four determinants; economy, technology, ideology and military. Jawaharlal Nehru's foreign policy had as its hard core the continuous augmentation of India's power in all its dimensions.<sup>20</sup> According to this policy, India should be the centre in all regional activities, and other countries of the region should fall in line India's aspirations. The thrust and contents of so called India doctrine or Indira doctrine has been seen as India's version of the 'Monroe Doctrine'. In line with this doctrine, Jaswant Singh has floated a concept according to which India would like to influence the internal politics of its neighbours so that its security is ensured.<sup>21</sup> This standpoint is further reinforced in the articulation of India's "Neighborhood Policy" which states that India will take whatever steps are necessary to safeguard its interest. Subash Kapila, an Indian security strategist, has argued that Bangladesh should not be allowed to be used as a "spring board" for anti-Indian activities and must not be "Talibanized". This goes in tune with the global anti-terrorist program undertaken by the US.<sup>22</sup>

**Bangladesh-India Relations.** Bangladesh-India relations are based on a historical congruence of interests, especially active during the Liberation War of Bangladesh of 1971. But this warmth of relations could not be sustained in between these two close neighbours in a peculiar geo-strategic environment. The Indian Security Specialist, JN Dixit notes that, "India's relations with Bangladesh have remained problematic for one reason or the other.....The point to be noted is that Bangladesh's creation and India's support to the process have not made much difference."<sup>23</sup>

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20. K Subrahmanyam. "Indian Security Perspective" ABC Publishing House, New Delhi, 1982, p. 128

21. Jaswant Singh, "National Security-An Outline of Our Concerns" Publishers, in association with United Service Institutions of India, New Delhi, 1996, Pp.59-60

22. Dr Subash Kapila " Bangladesh Misperceives New Indian Government's Foreign Policy Thrust - An Analysis", South Asia Analysis Group, Paper No 1017, June 2004, <http://www.saag.org/papers/II/paper1017.html>.

23. JN Dixit, "Future of Security in South Asia-Trends and Directions" in Security in South Asia : Trends and Directions, Vananda A, and Ashok C. Shukla (Ed), A PH Publishing Corporations, New Delhi, 2004, Pp. 10-11

However, the same author in “Liberation and Beyond” points out that India got involved in the Liberation movement of Bangladesh, inter alia, to meet India’s own political and strategic interests.<sup>24</sup> Indian academics influenced by its Press come up with comments, such as, “insurgents from North East India takes shelter in Bangladesh and are being trained in different camps inside Bangladesh”.<sup>25</sup> BJP leader LK Advani and analysts like Raja Mohan of Delhi University have expressed concern on issues which according to them pose a threat to India’s national security and which emanate from Bangladesh. Such allegations were countered by the then Bangladeshi Prime Minister, Khaleda Zia when she gave an open invitation to Mr Advani and civil society to visit Bangladesh and verify the existence of such military camps.

Bangladesh shares 4,156 km border with India of which 6.5 km remain undemarcated. This issue, along with the exchange of 62 enclaves and adversely possessed lands, has not been resolved due to lack of ratification of the Land and Border Agreement of 1974 by India. This agreement, however, was ratified and implemented by Bangladesh soon after its formulation. However, the broad-based accommodating “Gujral Doctrine” may offer some silver lining in the horizon.

**Indian Military Threats against Bangladesh.** The issues that could lead to Indian military action against Bangladesh may be summarised as follows; Firstly unresolved border demarcation and maritime boundaries; secondly, alleged illegal immigration into India; thirdly, India’s allegation that Bangladesh has been harbouring insurgents and facilitating insurgency in India’s NE states; fourthly, the impetus for development of the NE states and the need for access through Bangladesh; fifthly, India’s future requirements for resources, particularly fossil and marine ones and finally, water sharing issues.

### **The Myanmar Factor**

**General.** Myanmar’s location provides it a strategic advantage, since it serves as a “Land bridge” between the sub-regions of South-east and South Asia. Actions taken by the military regime there has twice led to the exodus of over quarter million Muslim minorities, known as Rohingyas, who live in the bordering province of Arakan that borders Bangladesh. The brutality the enemy

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24. JN Dixit, “Liberation and Beyond Indo-Bangladesh Relations”, UPL, Dhaka, 1999, p. 270

25. Singh, Awadhesh Kumar, “Bangladesh Illegal Immigration in India : Implications for National Security”, Pp. 204-206

face was unveiled on 21 December 1991 when there was a sudden attack on the Rijupara border outpost of Bangladesh threatening its sovereignty. The hostile act of the Nasakas of Myanmar<sup>26</sup> also indicates that Bangladesh faces threats from Myanmar as far as its national security is concerned.

**Bangladesh-Myanmar Relations.** Diplomatic relations between Bangladesh and Myanmar began officially on 13 January 1972, when what was then Burma recognized Bangladesh as the sovereign nation. Myanmar maintains both economic and political ties with Bangladesh. The Rijupara incident created a long-lasting mistrust which virtually took both the countries at one point to the brink of war.

Myanmar's recent emphasis on changed foreign policy and economic diplomacy has resulted in the formation of a Joint Economic Forum to promote joint venture initiatives in the industrial sector, and augment road and railway linkages to promote a new era of Bangladesh-Myanmar sustained bilateral relations. However, Myanmar's insurgency problem and the continuing longing to demographic migration of Rohingyas must not be viewed with neglect. The issues that could escalate military conflict between Bangladesh and Myanmar are firstly, illegal migration of huge number of Rohingya from Myanmar and secondly, the undemarcated maritime boundary between these two states.

### **Nuclear Proliferation**

South Asia today is clearly under a nuclear shadow. The effect of nuclear weapon on security interest of Bangladesh has not been defined yet and is unclear. However, the country would not be able to escape the collateral damage and fallout of a nuclear confrontation in South Asia.<sup>27</sup>

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26. "Nasaka Hostile Activities" Bhorer Kagoj, September 7, 1998, p.1

27. Iftekharuzzaman, 'Living with South Asia Nuclear Reality', The Daily Star, April 14, 2000,

## OPTIONS FOR BANGLADESH TO ADDRESS TRADITIONAL CHALLENGES/THREAT TO ITS NATIONAL SECURITY

### Non-Military Options

**Political Stability.** Military intervention by Bangladesh's potential adversary under a weak and unstable political environment cannot be ruled out even in the present global context. Bangladesh should not politically rely too much on "Oppose India" philosophy and expect any external assistance for its security need.<sup>28</sup> Development of a broad-based political system and objective based on democratic values would enable Bangladesh to safeguard its interest from both internal and external threats.

**Economic Development.** Economic development and security go hand in hand. To survive as a viable state, radical measures are needed to attain a robust economy and to sustain Bangladesh's defence capabilities, without which the country's security would be reduced to an ephemeral notion.

**Foreign Policy and Diplomacy.** The Foreign policy of a country is its first line of defence and security. Hence, Bangladesh's foreign policy objectives should be pursued both at the regional context and beyond. Bangladesh should endeavour to develop special relations with countries which are economically, ideologically and strategically important to Bangladesh. Its Foreign policy ought to be pursued so that it can serve as a deterrent against any external force. Bangladesh's foreign policy should aim to avoid, mitigate or postpone conflicts. Bangladesh should work with its neighbours in South Asia to build a climate of durable trust and understanding in the region. Thrust areas and future direction of Bangladesh foreign policy must be pursued earnestly.

**Refugee Management.** Myanmar's military threat may be mitigated by resolving Rohingya refugee issue through good gesture and by involving the UN and international legal systems.

**Policy of Neutrality.** The policy of neutrality is voluntarily declared by a state, while others commit themselves to respecting and upholding the status of a neutral country. Switzerland and Sweden are examples of neutral countries, but neutrality in the international community is more easily desired than achieved. Whether a policy of neutrality will be suitable for Bangladesh remains to be ascertained.

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28. Mohd Aminul Karim, op. cit, p. 160.

**Balancing versus Bandwagoning.** In the absence of numerical superiority, Bangladesh can opt for several diplomatic options like the following: policy of appeasement, reliance on nuclear deterrence or offensive conventional capability, alignment with great power and last but not least collective security. Out of these options, ‘collective security’ is the only viable path forward.<sup>29</sup> Bangladesh’s reliance on the US as part of a collective security agreement is a necessity, though the US request in 1998 to station its force under a Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) is yet to be agreed upon by the Bangladesh Government.<sup>30</sup> Bangladesh may try balancing instead of bandwagoning as the geo-political and geo-strategic environment is propitious for Bangladesh to opt for that strategy.

**Multilateralism.** Bangladesh’s experience with multilateralism is quite rich and varied. Therefore, it can be argued that Bangladesh has to explore and exploit all available sources of power and finance. Bangladesh’s strategy of multilateralism should be, firstly, to avoid and neutralize conflict with any external aggressor (s) and secondly, to resist any aggressor (s) through timely support of the international community if a conflict develops actually into a war.<sup>31</sup>

**Engagement.** The primary objective of any engagement policy is to minimize conflict and avoid war without compromising the existing international order. Bangladesh’s engagement policy should be more pertinent and relevant in respect of India and Myanmar, they being its closest neighbors.

**Reliance on the United Nations and the International Legal Systems.** Bangladesh’s involvement with the UN and the international legal system as a part of a strategy of multilateralism and a policy of continued commitment to world peace should be fully exploited to work as a deterrent for any potential military aggressor.

**Bilateral Approach : Bangladesh’s India Policy.** It is no secret that India has always been the prime object of concern in formulating Bangladesh’s foreign policy and in its security calculus. This is due to the asymmetry in size and power, the location factor and New Delhi’s strategic ambitions in the region. Among policy options to deal with this regional giant, it would be better for Bangladesh to develop a non-partisan policy towards India on the basis of sovereign equality and to build a peaceful, enduring and mutually beneficial relationship between the two close neighbours.<sup>32</sup>

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29. Mohd Aminul Karim , op cit, Pp 163-164

30. Mohammad Humayun Kabir, op cit, p. 271

31. Md. Nuruzzaman, “National Security of Bangladesh : Challenges and Options”, BIIS Journal, Dhaka, Vol. 12, No. 3, 1991, p. 402

32. Mohammad Humayun Kabir, op cit, Pp 271-272

**Regional Cooperation as a Security Strategy.** Regional cooperation through a holistic approach can reduce the level of threat. Total security for one state means insecurity for another and in any given regional setting, no state can be secure and at rest if its neighbours are feeling insecure.<sup>33</sup> The security of a Third World state like Bangladesh can best be protected on the basis of consensus on fundamental issue at the national and regional level. Bangladesh must also adopt a regional perspective on security matters and should look outwards to check any looming menace that she may be exposed to.

### **Military Options**

**Collective Security and Regional Security Arrangement.** Collective security arrangements at the regional level would be the best arrangement for the security of Bangladesh. Besides, any regional security cooperation in South Asia without India's participation is unlikely to yield any positive outcome. Restructuring SAARC as ARF will help nations to address such insecurity. It is by considering security dialogue on an extra-regional basis apart from regional security arrangement, Bangladesh will benefit in long run.

**Cooperative Security.** South Asian states should adopt the notion of cooperative security for their overall national security dynamics to prevent large scale aggression. Cooperative security is essentially military- centric. Mattoo, for example, has built a cooperative security model for South Asia, with military, political and socio-economic elements of cooperation in it, from a short, medium and long-term perspective.<sup>34</sup> Bangladesh should try to incorporate cooperative security as an agenda in SAARC or BIMSTEC as a part of its security strategy for dealing with neighbouring countries.

**Civil-Military Relations.** Civil-Military relation is increasingly gaining currency in the security studies parlance of Bangladesh. While political masters determine policy, military leaders need to provide a military view point. Healthy Civil-Military relation is needed to develop a viable national security policy to deter or defeat any perceived or real aggression.

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33. Lieutenant General (Retd) A I Akram, " The Security of Small States in South Asian Context", BISS Journal, January 1987, p. 19

34. Mohammad Humayun Kabir, op cit, Pp. 273-276

**National Security Apparatus.** The National Security Council (NSC) that was formed in 1982, and later on renamed National Committee for Security Affairs (NCSA) in 1992 is the highest security policy making body in Bangladesh. It has failed to fulfill its defined tasks and mandate. Bangladesh should re-think NSC and give it more power and authority to deal with national security affairs from a more comprehensive perspective.

**Strengthening National Power through Military Modernization.** Given the size of its economy, the security of Bangladesh depends largely on its ability to achieve qualitative superiority to avert the enormous disparity in quantitative war capabilities. The military force structure of Bangladesh and its modernization should depend on who it needs to fight with and for how long. Considering the equation of guns-versus-butter and geo-strategic realities, Bangladesh may adopt the following options. Firstly, adopt a deterrence strategy; secondly, consider the weapon system as a force multiplier; thirdly, aim for a large standing armed forces with small reserve; fourthly, consider a small standing army with a large reserve; fifthly, formulate a national defence strategy of Nation-in-Arms, a strategy built on the idea that arming of a nation is a great means of defence, although not cost effective. Finally, consider asymmetric warfare. As regards to ‘Nuclear South Asia’, Bangladesh may opt for a trilateral agreement about the “no-first-use” of nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapons state or seek protection under the nuclear umbrella of a world class power.

**Defence Policy.** As part of its defence strategy, Bangladesh’s defence posture should be non-proactive and non-threatening, but must include armed forces capability of credible deterrence and enduring national political will to use those forces to defend the country. Our NSC/NCSA and a Higher Defence Management Organization (HDMO) should aim for a dynamic defence policy aimed at maintaining the country’s core values as well as protect vital national interests.



## **NON-TRADITIONAL THREATS TO SECURITY: BANGLADESH CONTEXT**

### **General**

The new concept of comprehensive security deals with both traditional and non-traditional security (NTS) issues.<sup>35</sup> Apart from security for whom, from what/which sources and how, Greg Mills identifies four types of NTS threats; territorial, economic, political and environmental.<sup>36</sup> Besides, there is a serious need to examine other sources of threats and the nature and level of threats over time.

### **Economic Threat**

**General.** Threats to economic security in the Bangladesh context emanates from two sources : internally, from poverty and externally, from the process of globalization. The dull world economy after 9/11 and reduction of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) indicate Bangladesh's vulnerability as far as economic security is concerned.<sup>37</sup>

**Poverty Trend in Bangladesh.** Despite the avowed goals of planned development, the development strategies involved, poverty alleviation has been rather slow. The rural poverty index is twice as high as urban poverty in spite of the micro credit programmes of Non-Government Organizations (NGO) and food safety net programmes operative in rural areas. Unless Bangladesh grows far faster than it is doing, poverty will remain a crippling burden to the nation and to millions of its inhabitants. The perceived outcome of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) is still not clear. The foreign trade sector indicators depict an uncertain situation for Bangladesh in world trade.

**Dependence on Foreign Aids.** Bangladesh's external dependence is on the rise. Between 1971 and 1991, donors committed US \$ 22 billion of external grants and loans to Bangladesh.<sup>38</sup> In 1998-1999 alone, the amount of foreign aid was US \$ 1536 million<sup>39</sup> despite the hardening of conditionality. More ominous are the conditions being imposed all the time by donor countries.

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35. Abdur Rob Khan, op. cit.

36. Greg Mills, "A 21<sup>st</sup> Century Security Agenda : The End of Defence as We Know it ?" Strategic Balance, Vol XX, No. 2, May 1977, p. 181

37. The Daily Independent, September 18, 2002.

38. Samiruddin, Rumana, "Non-Military Security of Bangladesh", University Press Limited, Dhaka, 1996, p. 31

39. Statistical Pocket Book of Bangladesh 1999, p. 304

**Smuggling.** Smuggling is a major threat to the Bangladesh economy as smuggled goods from different countries of the world pour into Bangladesh. After the signing of a trade agreement with India on 28 March 1972, smuggling became rampant in Bangladesh from the early seventies, discouraging growth of domestic industries and threatening its ever-fragile economy.

### **Political Threat**

**Lack of Consensus on National Issues.** The lack of institutionalised politics and poor political culture and practice has been obstructing the development projects. Lack of internal cohesiveness and effective foreign policy has rendered the country vulnerable to foreign aggression and has also impeded internal economic growth and FDI.

**Political Unrest.** Since independence, the country has been rocked by political violence, and witnessed coups and counter coups. In fact, political history has been endemic in Bangladesh. Political parties and politicians still fail to agree on core issues. It can be said that Bangladesh is not only politically unstable from the security perspective, a weak state as well. The more the political situation worsens, the more the law and order situation deteriorates, creating human insecurity.

**Poor Law and Order Situation.** The prevailing poor law and order situation is a major impediment in the path of industrialization, FDI, political stability, economic growth and commerce and trade. The crime-population ratio is on the rise. In 1993, the ratio was 62.67 (per 100 thousand population) whereas in 1997, the figure was 83.74.<sup>40</sup>

### **Societal Threats**

**Human Trafficking.** Human trafficking, a major societal threat, is often loosely referred to as migration in the Bangladesh context. The leading causes of trafficking are poverty, social issues and lack of legal awareness and mass information campaign as well as an enabling policy environment.

**Violence and Crime.** In Bangladesh, societal security is often lacking due to social disorder, disharmony, violence, crime etc. The causes of violence are anger, frustration, revenge, poverty, adventurism, etc.

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40. M Azizul Haque, 'The Unfavorable Police Image', Bangladesh Observer, Dhaka, October 10, 1999.

**Drug Addiction.** Drug addiction is an ever-increasing problem due to easy access of drugs as well as socio-cultural-economic factors. An estimated 5 million people of this country are hard core drug addicts. Married male and female addicts have increased in number from 3% a few years ago to 33% at present. Needless to say that the trend is threatening.<sup>41</sup>

**Demographic Threat.** Bangladesh ranks as the eighth largest country of the world in terms of population size. The UN has projected the population density of Bangladesh as 1632 persons per square kilometer by 2025. If the growth rate cannot be checked effectively soon, the total population will be nearly 182 million by 2025.<sup>42</sup> The high population density has contributed in reduced farm land, deforestation, increase in crime and social tension.

**Money Laundering.** Money laundering has become a major problem undermining the fabric of our ill-structured society. Money accrued from illicit ventures is often invested in legitimate business, making it difficult for government agencies to keep track in financial transactions.

**AIDS.** The World Health Organization (WHO) is afraid that there are as many as 40,000 AIDS/HIV positive cases in Bangladesh due to Bangladesh's increased vulnerability to this deadly disease. According to a recent report, 60% of drug addicts have tested HIV positive.<sup>43</sup>

**Computer Crime.** As more and more information is made available cheaper, various groups will show a greater capacity to draw resources and conduct terror operations with little or no risks. One e-mail virus, 'I Love You' has thus led to business losses of estimated US \$ 1 billion. Attacks on computer networks controlling critical infrastructure and military computer networks have been assessed as one of the most dangerous threats to national security.<sup>44</sup>

### **Ecological Threat**

**Natural Disaster.** Bangladesh currently ranks as one of the world's foremost disaster-prone countries. The situation is aggravated, all the more, by its being the mostly densely populated country in the world. Environmental disasters ravage the country almost every year. Thus proper monitoring of disasters and adequate measures to deal with them are of utmost importance for national security.

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41. The New Nation, "The Threats from Drug Addiction", p.5

42. World Population Prospects 1990, United Nations, New York, 1993, p.20

43. Md Asadullah Khan, 'Disaster Waiting in the Wings', The Daily Star, September 15, 2000.

44. Dr Rohan Gunaratna, 'Transnational Threats in the Post Cold War Era', Jane's Intelligence Review, January 2001. p. 49

**Environmental Challenges.** In the ultimate analysis, environmental challenges are more threatening and more political than any other challenges and can lead to massive catastrophe even if nuclear war is averted. The combined effect of global warming, rising sea-level, harsher storms and subsistence may wreck much damage to Bangladesh, as it is known today that the country itself may virtually cease to exist.<sup>45</sup>

### **New External Sources, Nature and Level of Non-Traditional Threats: Concern For Bangladesh**

**Trans-border Insurgency.** Trans-border security dimension of insurgency in CHT arises from the fact that NE states of India and Arakan state of Myanmar are infested with chronic insurgency.<sup>46</sup> Bangladesh's security will be jeopardised if it is sucked into the vortex of NE insurgency. The domestic insurgency may gradually acquire a trans-border character. Indian officials and academics claim that Bangladesh has become the cross-roads of foreign intelligence agencies.

**Transit of Arms, Drugs across Bangladeshi Land.** Bangladesh is alleged to be a transit route for illegal weapons, a constant sore point in Bangladesh-India relations. The seizure of armaments in the country between 2003-2004 is a manifestation of activities of illegal arms dealer and the nexus that prevails amongst criminals of the underworld, the corrupt police force and hungry politicians. As regards to drug trafficking, Paris based Interpol has suggested that roughly 5% of world drug trafficking is routed through Bangladesh. The possession of illegal weapons by drug traffickers contributes to the spread of fear and violence, threatening overall social condition.<sup>47</sup>

**International Terrorism.** No nation including Bangladesh should or can remain immune to international terrorism since this problem is not confined to any geographical area.<sup>48</sup> Widespread terrorism and violence in recent years along with host of root causes and triggering factors, both domestic and trans-border ones are sources of threats to our national security. Today, terrorism poses serious social, political, economical and above all legal challenges to the survival of Bangladesh.

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45. M G Kabir, "Environmental Challenges and the Security of Bangladesh", BIJSS Journal, Vol. 10, No. 1, 1989, p. 92 and p. 99

46. Shafiqur Rahman, Brigadier General, 'Non-Traditional Military Threats to Security: Challenges for Bangladesh', NDC Journal, Vol.4, No.1, June 2005, p.4

47. Hoq. M. Emdadul, 'International Drug Traffickers and Security Concerns in Bangladesh', The Daily Star, December 06, 2003, p.1 and p.3.

48. Shafiqur Rahman, op cit, p.6.

### **New Internal Sources, Nature and Level of Non-Traditional Threats: Concern for Bangladesh**

**Clashes between Indigenous and Migrant People.** The dispute over settlements continues to remain in Bangladesh despite the signing of CHT Peace Accord in 1997. Bengalee settlers until now has been subjected to repeated attacks by the Shanti Bahini (SB). Therefore, it can be argued that armed violence in CHT will remain an unresolved issue until these disputes are amicably negotiated.<sup>49</sup>

**Clashes Among Insurgent Groups.** The conflict between JSS and UPDF is yet to be resolved and has led to killings and kidnappings of members of both groups. Non-tribal people are also involved/affected.<sup>50</sup>

**Violent Crimes Conducted by Criminal Gangs and Underground Left Leaning Extremist Parties.** Violent crimes are on the rise and can be linked to political god fathers and corrupt law enforcement agencies who are directly involved in extortion and other activities.<sup>51</sup> It is alleged that left-leaning extremist parties like “Jonojudha” and ‘Lal Pataka’ have links with the Nakshalite movements in India and that people have become hostages of different outlawed parties due to ever-rising terrorist activities.

**Violence Generated by Militant Religious Organizations.** Extremist religious groups have shown their capacity for violence all over Bangladesh on many occasions and must not be de-emphasized. Country wide grenade attacks by Jaamatul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) and the subsequent hangings of their top six leaders in late March 2007 was a high point in the official retaliation against terrorists. But it will be wrong to think that the JMB threat in Bangladesh is over because only 700 JMB extremists have so far been arrested, although their actual number is well over eight thousand.<sup>52</sup>

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49. Shafiqur Rahman, op cit , p.6

50. Ibid, Pp, 6-7

51. Rahman, SM Matiur, ‘Crushing Crime Network’, The Independent, March 09, 2004.

52. Editorial, The New Nation, Dhaka, Tuesday, April 03, 2007, p.5

## **ENHANCING BANGLADESH'S CAPACITY TO ADDRESS NON-TRADITIONAL THREATS TO ITS SECURITY**

### **General**

Combating all forms of non-traditional threats squarely is possibly wishful thinking in the present context for Bangladesh. The nation should rather opt for capacity building, strengthen the nationalist fabric and broaden its national security vision until it is strong enough to ward off insecurity both internally and externally.

### **Addressing Economic Threats**

**Economic Development.** Bangladesh's economic future will rest increasingly on tapping economic opportunities. Bangladesh must adopt a strategy for sustained economic development. Efficiency of economy in domestic and global markets coupled with rapid empowerment and equitable distribution of justice are essential for Bangladesh's economic development. It should aim to develop a self-reliant economy and ensure that foreign aid is not misused.

**Poor Must be Ready to Ride Globalization.** "Economic development is the front line of battle. Remove the debilitating effects of poverty, and the important battle will be won, and quite possibly the war. It will never be enough, or indeed good enough, for the small states to be just well defended bastions of poverty".<sup>53</sup> Globalization can help Bangladesh to overcome poverty quickly. However, if it leaves its poor at the mercy of globalization without preparing them to ride its waves, they will get drowned.<sup>54</sup>

### **Minimizing Political Threat**

**Political Stability.** The capacity of Bangladesh to deal effectively with problems of nation building and modernization depends upon the development of a coherent and viable political system. Political stability is connected to free and fair politics. There must be a consensus on major national issues and this will enable Bangladesh to tackle political insecurities.

**Good Governance.** Bangladesh should reform its system of governance transforming it from its current apathetic, secretive and unaccountable state to effective, responsive and accountable one. The reform should put greater emphasis on transparency, accountability and public participation.

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53. Sheila Harden, ed, 'Small is Dangerous : Micro State in a Macro World', Frances Printer Publishers, London, 1985, p. 8

54. Prof Muhammad Yunus, 'A National Strategy for Economic Growth and Poverty Reduction', The Daily Star, June 27, 2002.

### **Dealing with Societal Treat**

**Counter-Trafficking Programme Strategy (CTPS).** Trafficking is driven by a complex sets of dynamics, therefore, a CTPS should be developed that focuses on programming, implementation and a timeframe against which concrete progress can be measured.

**Improving Academic Atmosphere.** Although the literacy rate is estimated to be 64%, due to absence of proper academic atmosphere, the desired progress in education sector has not been made. The government should form an ‘Education Commission’ with a specific agenda and must ensure timely and effective implementation of viable recommendations.

**Combating Violence and Crime.** Rampant violence and crime should be minimized through police reform, strict enforcement of law and an oversight mechanism.

**Guidelines to Combat HIV/AIDS.** The national HIV and AIDS communication strategy 2005-2010 formulated by the interim caretaker government must be implemented.

### **Mitigating Ecological Threat**

**Environmental Policies and Development.** A well-articulated policy encompassing regional and global strategies together with mass awareness programme to sensitize public opinion and environmental legislation can be an effective instrument in any sustainable development initiative.

### **Suggested Measures to Deal With New Dimension of Non-Traditional Threats.**<sup>55</sup>

**Controlling the Influx of Weapons.** The root cause for ‘weaponisation’ in our society is poor governance. Political patronization of criminals and illegal possession of weapon must cease. Our surveillance status must be improved to control the influx of arms alongside sharing of information with neighbouring states and international organizations. To stop proliferation of small arms and to endure the test of time, socio-politico-economic aspects must be addressed in right earnest.

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55. Shafiqur Rahman, op cit, Pp. 15-20



**Controlling Cross-border Insurgency.** Insurgents and infiltrators, whether local or foreign, have been active carriers of small arms and light weapons. The nexus of local well-organized group and international illicit arms dealer must be identified and apprehended through a collaborative effort and brought under speedy trial. Bangladesh and its neighbours should not allow their territories to become havens for arm trafficking and insurgent activities.

**Control of Drug Trafficking.** Cross-border drug trafficking into Bangladesh is a threat to international security. The recent rise of cross-border drug trafficking and related rise in narcotic-related crime demand a well-concerted effort to curb trafficking and use of drugs.

**Police Reform.** Immediate police reform and its modernization strategy must receive top priority in Bangladesh agenda for good governance. Intelligence sharing at the inter- and intra- agencies must receive accelerated momentum. The newly formed RAB should deal with high-tech crimes and their posting and promotion should be based purely on merit and not on political allegiance.

**Solution of Insurgency Problem in CHT.** The signing of the CHT Peace Accord was a milestone in the security dynamics of Bangladesh. However, the spirit of the accord to bring back peace in CHT is yet to see fruition. The unimplemented issues of the Peace Accord should be immediately addressed.

**Addressing Political and Religious Extremists.** Unless efforts are taken to generate adequate employment, militants are likely to be lured by underworld elements to criminal activities, taking the advantage of their vulnerability. Well-concerted combined economic measures are required to tackle this situation. Besides, the syllabus of Madrasha education should be redesigned to create self-employment opportunities for Madrasha students.

**Legal Reforms.** The Judiciary should be de-politicised to ensure rule of law without any prejudice and discrimination and criminal investigation ought to be carried out to determine whether a defendant is guilty.

**Revival of Social Order.** The fact is that a strong community policing and effective social resistance can drastically reduce the threat of violence in a particular area. Such initiatives will curb violence and criminality in all forms.

**Addressing Border Disputes and Related Issues.** Border disputes are to be amicably settled, smuggling and illegal crossing of borders stopped and shooting/killing of poor people along the border averted through liaison and discussions at all levels. Neighboring states should constitute “Joint intelligence

and monitoring cell” to forecast probable vulnerabilities to national security and help resolve the dynamics of insecurity through information/intelligence sharing and confidence-building.

## CONCLUSION

The intent of this paper was to place the security context of Bangladesh in a broad framework and also to examine the various changes in the source, level and nature of threat to the national security of Bangladesh. The fact that the term security has now much wider dimension has led to this attempt to strike a balance between the realist restrictive vision and the expansionist argument of indiscriminate expansion of the concept and prescribe a more moderate concept of comprehensive security.

The paper argues that the security strategy of Bangladesh ought to be holistic in approach and composition due to potential military, non-military and non-classical threats inter-woven in inextricable knots. Security through internal capacity building and sustained development should form the *bulwark* of a comprehensive security strategy for Bangladesh.

While the paper attempted to examine the comprehensive security threats to Bangladesh through security and strategic studies, some policy guidelines have been suggested to address the threats squarely. However, this subject is complex, dynamic and ever-expanding, and therefore, an analytical eye should be kept on the threats to update and tackle Bangladesh’s security problems in the future.

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