

Security in the Twenty First Century

A Bangladesh Perspective

Edited by
Mufleh R Osmany
Muzaffer Ahmad

This book highlights some of the primary strategic and security concerns of Bangladesh. As an international actor, Bangladesh's aspirations are rather modest. Seeking a regional niche in the context of strategy and security is more commensurate with the realities of size, power and influence of Bangladesh. The external security imperatives oblige Bangladesh to remain constructively engaged at the global level, while focusing more on the regional realities. Security has been looked at from both traditional and non-traditional points of view in this volume.

Enhancement, optimal utilization, conservation and protection of strategic resources and endowments of the country belong to the core area of national security. Both material and non-material strategic elements, which are of critical importance to national security, have been broadly surveyed in this book. A holistic study of strategy and security cannot ignore the institutional aspects including direction, control, supervision and coordination of the range of activities associated with national security. This book has touched upon the urgent need for a National Policy on Management of Strategic Resources and Security Institutions of the country and better integration and coordination at the higher policy level of the institutional aspects of national strategy and security.

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INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of security straddles the domains of both perception and reality. So does strategy. Perception being a function of the sense and sensitivities of the actors, state as well as non-state, and the imperfections of the environment, does not always approximate the realities. The reality on its part remains largely obscure vis-a-vis the actors, behind the mist of deception, non-transparency and non-communication. All these variables add up to the complexities and confusion of academic approach towards understanding and analysis of strategy and security in the context of a given state.

This book is an academic attempt to highlight some of the primary strategic and security concerns of Bangladesh. As a state actor, Bangladesh obviously does not belong to the top power-league and thus does not aspire for global power and influence. Seeking a regional niche in the context of strategy and security is more commensurate with the realities of size, power and influence of Bangladesh. The external security imperatives oblige Bangladesh to remain constructively engaged at the global level, while focusing more sharply on the regional realities. Articulation of Bangladesh specific verities relating to strategy and security, as it would be evident from this book, remained somewhat restrained and circumspect for understandable compulsions

Enhancement, optimal utilization, conservation and protection of strategic resources and endowments of the country belong to the core area of national security. Both material and non-material strategic elements, which are of critical importance to national security, have been broadly surveyed in this book. A holistic study of strategy and security cannot ignore the institutional aspects including direction, control, supervision and coordination of the range of activities associated with national security. A number of ministries, departments and agencies are functionally interlinked in the formulation and execution of security related policies and activities. This book has touched upon

the urgent need for a National Policy on Management of Strategic Resources and Security Institutions of the country and better integration and coordination at the higher policy level of the institutional aspects of national strategy and security.

Most developing countries are perceived to be "weak states" by some scholars in view of insouciant leadership and fragile socio-political cohesion. Leadership is one of the decisive strategic aspects of national security. Our War of Liberation provides a historic example of the impact of holistic leadership of a nation on the security of its ideals and interests. Leadership in all its ramifications including political, bureaucratic, corporate, academic & civil-society, needs to be studied in the context of security of a state. Similarly the holistic dimensions of socio-economic cohesion in a developing society, where fledgling democracy and faltering economy continue to foster socio-political fragmentation, deserve to be objectively analysed for a better understanding of internal vulnerabilities. Unfortunately, the high level socio-political cohesion achieved during the War of Liberation was frittered away by short-sighted leadership and stunted democracy. Corruption, poor governance, terrorism, ambivalent role of the opposition and winner-takes-all kind of attitude of the successive parties in government tend to tear asunder the polity of the nation. Any serious study of national security must include these cardinal socio-political aspects of security. But the time for these ideas to be publicly debated do not seem to have yet come, in most developing countries, including Bangladesh.

Amidst all the material wherewithal of strategy and security one may feel very insecure. For that matter a society, a state, even a group states, may feel insecure not withstanding decisive military power. This brings us to the psychological dimension of security. Materially and militarily by far the most powerful state on earth, the United States, should have felt as the most secure state on earth today. Despite all the singular attributes of unchallenged physical power, the political and diplomatic conduct of the US betrays

the lack of a sense of security within US polity. The psychological aspects of security are a function of political leadership and socio-political orientation of a state. This study could not deal with this aspect of strategy and security.

The low level threshold of socio-political tolerance puts a limit on objective public discussion, even academic discussion, on many national issues in a developing country. Even in a developed democracy like the USA, which can be defined as a "strong-state", any criticism today 'by an American national' of the policy of the government can be dubbed as unpatriotic. If such a criticism emanates from an alien source, it can be taken as downright hostile and even supportive of terrorism. It was considered prudent to avoid in-depth treatment of socio-political dimensions of security. May be at a future date, when the socio-political environment will be more supportive of objective analysis of socio-political realities in the context of national security, scholars and researchers may explore the limits of evolving level of socio-political tolerance and acceptability of self-criticism.

Economic security is the most important area of non-traditional security for Bangladesh. Environmental security, Health Security and Energy security are other significant areas of non-traditional security concerns for Bangladesh. We could not sharply focus on these important areas of non-traditional security owing to time constraint and institutional limitations. The editors are of the view that such a book would have served the readers better if these areas of non-traditional security could be treated in a more comprehensive manner. Our inability in this regard, it is hoped, will be understood by the readers.

Security of a state today is equally threatened by both state actors and non-state actors. Terrorist organisations, international criminal gangs and trans-national companies are the kind of non-state actors which all programmes of national security need to reckon with. One trans-national company called the East India Company entered our country four hundred years ago as a benign trader but emerged as the

ruler of the country about hundred and fifty years later, taking full advantage of the internal vulnerabilities and the lack of socio-political cohesion of the national polity. Security planners need to take these lessons of history seriously. Smugglers, terrorists, corrupt leaders at all levels of society and criminals are threatening our security rather seriously. The nation needs to wake up to these stark realities. This book has touched upon these important aspects of national security of Bangladesh.

Maritime security has not received adequate attention and resources in Bangladesh so far. The chapter on maritime security seeks to attract attention of all concerned towards the urgent need for creating required institutional focal-point within the government for coordination of maritime governance, maritime studies and maritime security. The urgent need for a comprehensive National Ocean (or Maritime) Policy and importance of integration and coordination of Maritime Governance and Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) have also been highlighted in this book. Currently, a number of ministries and government agencies are dealing with maritime issues, apparently in a rather uncoordinated set of activities. This effort will be considered worthwhile if some degree of awareness is generated within the government as well as within the civil society about the significance of maritime security in the total framework of national security of Bangladesh.

A work of this nature is generally expected to include a chapter on Defense Policy. Bangladesh, like all South Asian States, does not have a published and comprehensive policy on defense related matters. Civil-Military relations is yet another important area of study in the context of National Defense Policy and National Security. Mobilizing the entire nation for National Defense is an important area of security activities. Our National experience of the War of Liberation avers that the indomitable will and power of the people can overcome highly armed aggressors. The socio-political culture of the country does not very much encourage public discussion on all the issues associated with national defense

policy. Perhaps in the future a BISS publication will be able to cover such vital aspects of national security.

This is a commemorative publication. BISS (Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies) celebrates the 25th year of its existence. While commemorating the Silver Jubilee of its birth, in June 1978, BISS recalls with respect all the former Chairmen and members of the Board of Governors who gave inspiring leadership to this national institution over a quarter of a century. The leadership and guidance given by Professor Muhammed Shamsul Huq, the first Chairman of BISS, will always remain a source of inspiration for this institution. The support of the current Board of Governors of BISS and the dedicated work of the members of BISS has been of singular importance in bringing out this book. The editors would like to thank all associated with this work for their contributions.

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