

# Challenges to Bangladesh's maritime security

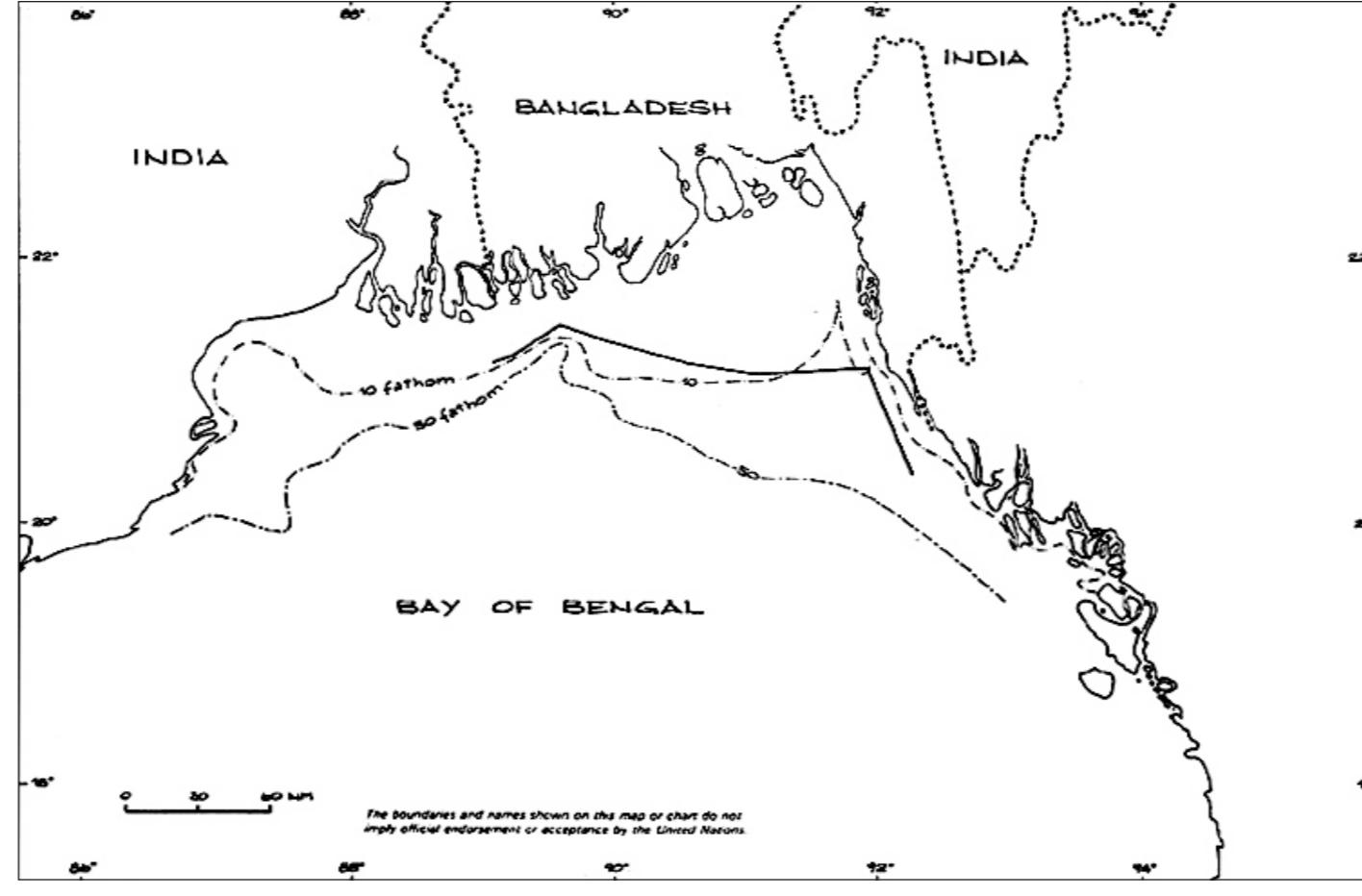
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It is very much evident from our geography, seafaring and ship-building traditions and commercial ties with the countries of the region that Bangladesh is an important maritime state. The lengthy coastline, Sea Lines Of Communication (SLOC) in the Bay of Bengal, and as per the UNCLOS, 1982, which provide us with a vast maritime area more than 2,07,000 sq miles bears testimony to the fact. The vast proportion of our foreign trade - 90% in volume and 80% in value terms - is sea-borne. Nonetheless, there appears to be a lack of a basic appreciation of the security aspects of maritime interactions over the years. Bangladesh's security considerations continue to be dominated by developments on land with maritime affairs being perceived merely as an extension of these activities. Time has come for us to appreciate the challenges to our maritime security. Maritime security issues are of both military, and economic in nature. In this context, ports, shipping and imports of energy resources, for example, should be seen as critical dimensions of maritime security. In the emerging security environment, Bangladesh's dependence on the sea will increase in terms of trade, energy resources, shipping, sustainable exploitation of marine resources and ocean research and exploration. The maritime domain has always been a cost effective medium for trade amongst countries. The developmental index of a state is closely linked to its reliance on seaborne trade and its need for energy resources and thus, the criticality of sea lines for Bangladesh. Maritime trade, including energy resources, is carried out following the established sea lines - the shortest, most cost effective and navigationally safe routes between source and destination and in naval parlance; these maritime highways are referred to as the 'SLOC'. With

communication being a crucial element of military operations, this is indicative of the military strategic importance of sea lines. It is no wonder then that, in preparations for inter-state hostilities, much of the strategic and operational level calculations of states have been centered on the security of sea lines.

Much of the insecurities of sea lines stem from inherent vulnerabilities - the unregulated nature of the maritime realm, the fragile trading system and the transnational nature of the shipping industry. The Bay of Bengal and its SLOC are also becoming increasingly vulnerable to disruption to a range of criminal and clandestine activities. These include smuggling, arms and narcotics trafficking, illegal fishery activities, pirate attacks, theft, fraud, Flag of convenience, terrorism and other illegal activities, marine pollution and oil related environmental disasters at sea. There are clear links between the narcotics and illegal light weapons trade that include shared supply and transit routes and funding of gunrunning through drug trade and vice versa. Coastal security was not a serious issue addressed by the Government for up gradation of the Coast Guard so far and our island territories are largely inhabited and lie at considerable distances from the mainland and are particularly vulnerable to clandestine activities and illegal infiltration and occupation.

Since 100% of our energy requirements of crude oil are currently shipped from abroad, increased focus would be required on the ability to maintain the safety and security of energy shipments and the prevention of any disruption of supply. Also, as about 10% of our gas demands are generated in offshore areas, the defence of maritime assets and infrastructure is critical. In accordance with current trends, domestic shipping is not keeping pace with the increasing volume of crude oil imports. Not



having tankers, the proportion of crude oil carried on Bangladesh bottoms has reduced drastically. Our shipping fleet is ageing rapidly and can hardly carry about 7% of our total exports and imports. These issues arising from the impact of not having enough national carriers would be an important factor on our national security in times of uncertainty or hostility. The inefficiency of our ports, with low productivity and high traffic handling times, also has a negative impact upon the economic growth and development. Whereas the Average Ship Turn Around time for container ships in ports such as Singapore is only 6-8 hours, it is as high as few days at the

Chittagong Port, the country's most modern port. This will necessitate additional port capacities or reviving Mongla Port to cater to the growing volume of exports and imports. A terrorist attack on ships carrying dangerous and hazardous cargo, especially in ports, would result in considerable human and material damage as well as environmental destruction over a wide area of land and sea. The oil terminals as well as existing oil refineries are especially vulnerable to sabotage. The mining of narrow sea-lanes or approaches to ports will also remain a source of concern. Suicide missions on naval and maritime-related economic targets have taken place

in other countries. Bangladesh's maritime zones, over which it has certain rights and obligations, include a Territorial Sea up to 12 nm (22 km) from the baseline, a Contiguous Zone from 12 to 24 nm (22-44 km), an Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) from 12 to 200 nm (22-370 km) and an Extended Continental Shelf (CS) up to 350 nm. These zones or as we call 'Sea Bangladesh' currently comprise 2,07,000 sq km area of sea, equivalent to 1.4 times of the total 'Land Bangladesh.' provided we can claim the area for formal delineation of the CS by 2011. In effect, this would provide Bangladesh with sovereign rights over all non-living resources

and sedimentary organisms within 650 km from the coast and a vast "maritime area" and "strategic space" for Bangladesh.

The regulatory mechanisms in Bangladesh's maritime zones need to be strengthened by the enactment of new legislation and enforced by setting up new mechanisms for implementation. This could include the promulgation of anti-piracy laws, legislation for the exploitation of mineral resources and the designation of Marine Protected Areas (MPA). Some of the other important policy challenges to maritime security include scientific research, the ability to deal with dual-use scientific data and prod-

ucts, the protection and sustainable utilisation of the marine environment and prevention, and if necessary, quick response to pollution from land-based sources, shipping and oil slicks.

Transnational threats and assistance during natural disasters have spawned a multitude of additional out of area operational roles for our navy. The geo-political environment in our immediate neighbourhood is currently in a state of high tension and increased naval and military related activity. The presence of these modern warships, points to the very essence of maritime power - the flexibility, mobility and reach of lethally armed and equipped naval forces. They serve as an important lesson to us in terms of the potential, efficacy and multipurpose nature of naval power. Over the years, the Bangladesh Navy has not developed into a multi-dimensional force with lethal weaponry and sensors, and enhanced reach. Its modernisation could not keep pace with rapidly advancing technologies and doctrines of modern warfare. The naval battlefield environment is changing rapidly. The Information Age has spawned the 'Revolution in Naval Affairs', which is producing new lethal weapon systems, capabilities, yielded precision weapons and seamless communication networks, and considerably reduced response time for naval forces and facilitating the militarisation of outer space and cyber-related crime. The continuing militarisation of the Indian Ocean and the dynamic role of technology on naval warfare will also impact upon the country. It is imperative, therefore, that maritime security issues are perceived in a holistic, not a compartmentalised, manner.

Since 1971, Bangladesh has not demarcated its maritime boundaries with India and Myanmar. Harassment of our fishermen takes place regularly and much of our fishery resources are being plundered away. It's too long that we have not been able to solve any of the outstanding maritime issues

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## NSC - Is there a need for one?

BARRISTER HARUN UR RASHID

A question has been raised on whether Bangladesh needs a National Security Council (NSC) to oversee and supervise the integration of foreign and defence policies to preserve the nation's security and advance it abroad. There are two views on the matter.

Let us examine the issue in the following paragraphs.

The word "security" presupposes something to be secured. In this context it is relevant to ask four questions:

- What is being secured?
- What is being secured against?
- Who provides security?
- What methods may be undertaken to provide security?

### National Security: What does it mean?

National security is essentially related to the security of the territorial integrity and sovereignty of a state. State-security is a long-term health and viability of a state. It has to be secured at all costs by governments and people. There is no compromise on it.

Threats to the nation does not only emanate from external sources. Insecurity of a state may emerge from internal divisive issues, such as political, economic and social. Accordingly, state apparatus must ensure that internal destabilizing factors must not threaten the security of a state.

For example, the former Soviet Union collapsed in 1991 not because of any external aggression, but because of widespread social, economic and political chaos within the Soviet Union, the forces of which were released by an era of change under the twin banners of "perestroika" (reforms) and "glasnost" (openness), launched by the Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev in 1985.

Around Bangladesh, Nepal was almost at the brink of being a failed state because of rebellion of Maoists for ten years until peace was made with the rebels. Sri Lanka has been confronting Tamil rebels since 1983, destabilizing the security of the nation. All these events demonstrate that internal divisive forces are at the root of insecurity of a state.

Against this background, the modern approach of security of a state depends on the following elements:

- Good governance and strong state institutions. Upholding public morality in actions and conduct of political leaders.
- Sound economic policies including economic diplomacy for sustained economic growth.
- National wealth must be equitably managed and distributed to reduce the gap between rich and poor within a state.
- Existence of participatory government with elected

representatives at the local government level.

- Protection of minorities and ethnic groups including personal security.
- Enlisting support of people to promote unity and cohesion of people for security.

Many writers including Professor Francis Fukuyama of the Johns Hopkins University have underscored the need of strengthening public institutions because weak or failed institutions pose a threat to security of a state.

### NSC and its objectives

Ordinarily NSC is set up to discharge the following functions:

- (a) determining national security policy in the context of political, intelligence, social, cultural and economic situations.
- (b) supervision and co-ordination of inter-ministerial activi-

agency review of major foreign and national security issues, culminating in discussion and decision at the highest level of government.

The NSC in general comprises of (a) the executive head of the government, (b) foreign minister, (c) defense minister, (d) finance minister, (e) heads of three armed services and (f) the heads of intelligence.

The head of the government could designate from time to time other ministers and high officials of the government in NSC.

Protagonists of NSC in Bangladesh believe that it is necessary to setup NSC, either by law or by amending the constitution for security related matters. Furthermore they argue that good governance and liberal democracy require certain habits of mind and conduct of political leaders. Until these attributes are achieved, NSC should have a role to play.

### The Other View

On the other hand, many political observers perceive the formalization of NSC as institutionalisation of military influence over politics. They argue that such role is not desirable. The very fact that the President is the supreme commander of defense services (Article 61 of the Constitution) symbolizes the supremacy of the elected civilian administration over the defense services.

In any case, under existing laws and provision of the Constitution, the civilian administration could call in defense services at any time to stabilize the country. The President promulgated an emergency on 11 January and called defense services to restore law and order in the country. People have appreciated

## Prospects of Indo-Bangla strategic partnership-Part III

WALI-UR RAHMAN

SOME years ago in a conference in Washington DC, I said "It is not from benevolence of the butcher, the brewer or the baker that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest. We address ourselves, not to their humanity but to their self-love, and never talk to them of our own necessities but of their advantages." [Adam Smith] My subject was the United States and how she could provide Bangladesh the necessary technology and capital investment to explore our energy potential. Today when we take a preview of the near meltdown of the energy sector in Bangladesh under the four-party alliance government, I again take recourse to Adam Smith.

With the advent of summer and the Ides of March not far away we are waiting for the inevitable. With shopping malls shut down at 7 p.m., we save about 100 megawatt or so. That is good but not enough.

Our peak-hour demand in the next six months may go up to 5000 megawatt or more, if all the demand sectors including the countrywide power demand for irrigation of the farmlands are to be met. The Ganges-Kobadak (known as GK) project is gasping for breath leaving a large swath of rich farmland in Kushtia-Jessore belt dry. Canals have not been dredged to bring water from the river, and culverts not supervised; while always whipping the Indian hobby-horse, we have not spent a moment to think about the possibility of 'water-management'. We should and must continue making demarches to India about the lean-period supply, but not neglecting the possibility of using the abundant water we receive during the rainy season. Some countries have done so to their benefit. One should remember that negotiations between the two sovereign nations are never smooth when both the claimants have their supreme national interest at stake. Thus the Ganges Water Treaty of 12 Dec 1996 and CHT Accord of 2 Dec 1997 left both India and Bangladesh feeling awkward. The diplomatic jargon is that when both the negotiating parties are unhappy with a treaty, then 'it is a good treaty'! If one party believes that she has been shortchanged, the treaty is likely to be short lived.

For the last 36 years, Bangladesh has suffered misgovernance and one of the results has been the widening disparity of income between rich and poor and threatening internal cohesion and unity. Desperation, deprivation and helplessness, according to many observers, have prompted many of young people to join the Islamic militancy in the country.

The militancy has posed a strong threat to security of Bangladesh and it needs to be curbed with active cooperation of people. There was a seminar by BEI in the last week of December as to the strategy for combating terrorism in Bangladesh and many participants articulated their strategies in addressing this important national disturbing issue.

Against this background, sup-

porters believe that there is a need for formalizing a role of NSC in the country's governance. Wide discussion and debate among stakeholders is necessary before setting up NSC.

free zone, Ambassador Garcia Robles, the visionary father of the Treaty, later Nobel laureate, used to say "I, will rather die with the Treaty unfinished, but I shall be the last man to sign a Treaty, when even one sovereign country thinks her interest has been totally overlooked." Look at the word 'totally', this is the 'cornerstone' of an Agreement, of a bargaining chip. Napoleon had called the British Ambassador a liar in public; the French ran a Jacobin fifth column in England, and the British subsidized monarchist uprisings in France. But they never broke relations and diplomats were rubbing shoulders with each other in maintaining the usual etiquettes of diplomatic behaviour.

We have noted very recently some quick and expected response from India. When the Government of Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed is making the right gestures to India, with the Indian External Affairs Minister being reassured by the Chief Executive that the Bangladesh territory will not be allowed to be used by IIGs or anti-Indian terrorist groups, be it indigenous or exogenous, the confidence level seemed to have reached a new height. One appreciates, with the available security infrastructure in the country, we may not rope in all the 'wrong-doers', but the language is correct, rhetoric right; this is the soul of post-modern diplomacy. The days of 'telling lies' is over; today 'an honest word of an honest man' is the soul of diplomacy to the mutually advantageous international relations.

Even before the Energy Adviser could depart from Dhaka, his Indian counterpart suggested certain ideas about harnessing the excess power wealth in Bhutan and Nepal. He mused about investment in those countries tailored to the energy demands of the SARRC countries. Energy strategists in South Asia and the world have not missed on what the Indian Minister said, hitherto unheard of in the chancelleries of this region and beyond. Once India has offered the idea of using excess hydro-power of those countries, the rest can follow. I strongly believe that our citizens are clever. They are real patriots. The recent happenings in Kansat, Phulbari, Shonir Akhra are but few examples. Our burgeoning industrial sector leaders, the new garment entrepreneurs of

Bangladesh won't have anything to do with the narrow tunnel-vision politicians, to the detriment of our national interest.

### A subaltern view of NSC

This brings us to the issue of NSC. What is a National Security Council? It is the body that will look into precisely those issues like energy security and power availability, or advise the government about how to deal with the political meltdown engendered by dishonest politico-bureaucratic combine, or the unholy nexus between corrupt politicians and moon-shiner business people, a few in number, without being influenced by any short-term or even midterm political gain. The council's job is to ensure the sovereignty of the Republic and safeguard its constitution. True, in the past years the idea of such a council used to create suspicion in the people's minds about the ulterior motive. When the idea was first launched in 1985, it did not get popular support for understandable reasons. But times have changed. Today the citizens of the Republic would like to see the country prosper, the economic growth and life standard improve, education be universal with 100 percent literacy as in Indonesia and now in Malaysia or the Philippines, the trade imbalances corrected, new pastures for investment at home and broad explored, rule of law secured, political corruption and bureaucratic malfeasance checked, the Republic's limited resources be used to the benefit of the people, and not squandered or embezzled as in the past.

In the name of religion, terror cells cannot be set up in the country and political Islam be propagated, the territory be used as a safe route for smuggling of arms and hardware to other countries. One research available with us demonstrates the gory picture of arms being sent to Afghanistan, LTTE, ULFA, IIGs, LET in Kashmir and other non-party and subaltern non-state actors of the region with Bangladesh as a conduit. The great arms haul of 2004 is still under wraps. We don't know what happened to the consignment, which included, we believe, lethal weapons including howitzers, anti-tank guns and shoulder-to-shoulder missiles. Bengali newspapers including the Prothom Alo and the Janakantha, which ventured to explore the matter were asked to stop. We have not heard anything since then. Where did the weapons go? Bangladesh territory was being used for transport of heroine and other drugs some consignments had been caught with a tip-off from the British intelligence, indicting a local food company. But nothing has been heard since then. The Republic was at the mercy of a mafia gang.

These are the areas which the NSC would look into in a detached fashion in non-political ambience only to secure our national interest and the sovereignty of the Republic. In all these efforts India could be a natural ally. They have similar problems though not exactly of the same nature. Their security system or surveillance mechanism is much more sophisticated and advanced than ours. But we can always share our experience without devaluing our sovereignty. A shared history as we have, we can also share our experience as equals.

We can take advantage of their knowledge without sacrificing our supreme national interest. Remember even after ASEAN was formed, Indonesia and Malaysia was about to go to war. But today, ASEAN is not only ASEAN Plus Two, ASEAN Plus Seven. This is necessary; this is their national security consideration for the region and member countries. In 1968, the residence of the Singapore Ambassador in Jakarta was burnt to ashes by a violent Indonesian mob because two Indonesians were hanged in Singapore. But the steady progress of ASEAN has not suffered. This is a vision job. This is a job that the politicians can do with the diplomats in tow and the National Security Council in support, for the future of the country and the region. Indo-Bangla cooperation and friendship is only natural. And an organ like the National Security Council can deliver that. Indo-Bangla strategic partnership is only a matter of time. The sooner leaders of the two great neighbors understand, the better for the region and the world.

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ties in security matters inside and outside.

(c) analytical information from various ministries to consider best possible options for decision in security matters.

(d) co-ordination of internal, foreign and defense policies and their implementation.

(e) exploitation of intellectual resources of the country for facing the internal and external threats.

NSC is established either by the Constitution or by law. The US had set up its NSC under National Security Act of 1947, while Turkey and Iran have established it by amending their Constitutions.

The NSC works as a principal arm of the government, determining, monitoring and implementing security policies of a state. The strength of the NSC system is arguably based on regular inter-

the role of the defense services in stabilizing the lawlessness and turmoil in the country.

Furthermore, it is argued that the liberal democratic image of Bangladesh may suffer in international community, if such role of military through NSC is provided. For example, the overarching role of military in Turkey's national politics seems to be one of the impediments for Turkey's entry to the European Union.

**Conclusion**

It appears that there are merits and demerits of formalizing a role of NSC in the country's governance.

Wide discussion and debate among stakeholders is necessary before setting up NSC.

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