

What the next government must get right on national security

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Conversely, a state with credible defensive capability can engage diplomatically from a position of confidence. Deterrence and diplomacy are therefore mutually reinforcing rather than contradictory.

RESPONDING TO MYANMAR AND ARMED NON-STATE ACTORS

The idea of credible deterrence brings the Myanmar question to Bangladesh's eastern security theatre, which demands particular attention in the post-election period, not only because of Myanmar's unresolved internal conflict, but because the erosion of authority across its border regions has begun to test Bangladesh's sovereignty in tangible ways. Myanmar's conflict shows no immediate signs of resolution, and the expanding influence of armed groups such as the Arakan Army has altered the security calculus along Bangladesh's southeastern frontier. These actors are no longer peripheral insurgent formations; they are increasingly capable, territorially embedded, and transnational in outlook.

For the incoming government, the challenge lies in managing instability without normalising violations of sovereignty. While restraint has been a



The Bay of Bengal is central to Bangladesh's economic and security future.

FILE PHOTO: STAR

defining feature of Bangladesh's approach, restraint must be clearly bounded. Drawing and communicating red lines is essential to prevent ambiguity from being misinterpreted as acquiescence. Incidents such as the abduction of Bangladeshi fishermen in coastal waters, disruptions to maritime activity, and the rerouting of tourist vessels between Teknaf and Cox's Bazar due to security concerns illustrate how non-state violence and cross-border instability can directly affect livelihoods, commerce, and public confidence.

Airspace violations originating from Myanmar during periods of heightened conflict further underscore the risks of spillover. Even when unintentional, such incidents carry symbolic and strategic significance, as they challenge the state's control over its sovereign domain. If left unaddressed,

they risk establishing precedents that weaken deterrence and invite further encroachment.

The post-election government must therefore adopt a calibrated approach that combines enhanced border security, intelligence coordination, and sustained diplomatic engagement, while making clear that certain actions will not be tolerated. A purely militarised response would risk escalation and humanitarian consequences, particularly in a region already burdened by refugee pressures. Yet excessive restraint carries its own dangers, potentially emboldening armed actors and complicating future crisis management.

Managing this balance will be among the most complex security tasks facing the new administration. It will require institutional clarity, rapid decision-making mechanisms, and credible signalling—both domestically

and internationally—that Bangladesh remains committed to peace while remaining equally resolute in exercising its sovereignty.

NON-TRADITIONAL SECURITY THREATS AND COGNITIVE VULNERABILITY

Beyond kinetic threats, Bangladesh faces a growing array of non-traditional security challenges that directly affect social cohesion and institutional strength. Cognitive warfare, misinformation, and disinformation campaigns exploit societal fault lines and undermine trust in institutions. Distorted historical narratives, identity fragmentation, and norm erosion can polarise society and weaken democratic resilience.

These threats are particularly insidious because they operate below the threshold of armed conflict. They do not trigger conventional defence

responses, yet their cumulative impact can be destabilising. Addressing them requires strategic communication, media literacy, institutional credibility, and political restraint.

Internal security concerns further complicate the picture. The emergence of armed groups such as the Kuki-Chin National Front in the Chittagong Hill Tracts highlights the enduring challenge of managing peripheral regions where governance deficits, identity grievances, and transnational linkages intersect. Militarised responses alone risk aggravating tensions; sustainable solutions demand political engagement, development, inclusion, and intelligence-driven law enforcement.

A STRATEGIC WINDOW THAT WILL NOT LAST

The post-February election period offers Bangladesh a rare strategic window. The new government begins with political legitimacy, regional attention, and relative internal stability. Whether this moment is used to articulate a coherent national security framework or allowed

Defence self-reliance is not achievable through procurement alone. It requires an ecosystem that connects education, research, and industry.



Bangladesh faces a growing array of non-traditional security challenges that directly affect social cohesion and institutional strength.

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