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Bangladesh - U. S. Relations

AID TO PARTNERSHIP DIALOGUE

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Theoretical framework

To explain and analyze Bangladesh- U.S. relations, two key concepts are used in this paper. These are: “asymmetry” and “complexity of relations”. An important implication of ‘asymmetry’ is the increased complexity of the game that is likely to induce dynamics that are absent in symmetric settings. In his famous book *The Paradox of American Power*, Harvard Professor Joseph Nye stated so aptly “... a nation never had so much power as wielded by the U.S., and yet at the same time a nation has never been so interdependent with the rest of the world”¹. No doubt, the U.S. used to bestride the globe like a colossus – dominating business, commerce communications, and economy with military might second to none. But it is also agonizing to witness how this most powerful nation has to undergo enormous geopolitical changes and challenges over the past one and half decade. Americans today has to rediscover their country as ‘America First’ with “Make America Great Again” slogan, trying to adjust losses for invasions and interventions in Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, and Syria. In fact, U.S. power, its influence, its reach are now shaky, and the perspectives on application of U.S. power are hotly contested². Not surprisingly, therefore, the U.S. is eroding its long-held values undermining the core of its development assistance program with “transactional” world view. Sometimes, U.S. top policy makers’ fawning relations with non-democratic rulers raise concerns to aspiring democratic leaders. U.S. foreign policy lexicon of ‘strategic partnership’, ‘partnership dialogue’, or even defense cooperation or alliance relations seems to be losing much of their substance in a multi-centric global power structure having ‘contested leadership’ of Russia, China, Europe, India and Japan.

Background

It is unique, however, that despite huge asymmetry in power and capability, Bangladesh-U.S. relations exemplify a successful model of mutual cooperation. These relations evolved over the past years in response to changing regional and global events, as well as motivations and perception of state actors and people. Bangladesh’s interests and perceptions for expanding relations with U.S. were shaped by some historical events, key security threats, political aspirations, and drive for economic growth. Historically, U.S.

1. Joseph S. Nye, *The Paradox of American Power: Why the World’s Only Superpower Can’t Go It Alone* (Oxford University Press, 2002)

2. Christopher Nichols, *The Limits of American Power*, American Military and Diplomatic History Conference, May 7, 2013

secured a close identity in Bangladesh's foreign policy since the days of Pakistan era. Hussein Shahid Suhrawardy, the great Bengali leader, fifth Prime Minister of Pakistan, was probably the staunchest advocate of friendship with the United States. Ironically, Bangladesh independence movement coincided with the timing of US's historical opening up with China through Pakistan- a key U.S. ally at that time. Despite Nixon administration's "tilt" towards Pakistan, there was widespread sympathy and support from the American people and the U.S. Congress for Bangladesh people³.

After the liberation of Bangladesh in December 1971, the United States formally recognized the newly independent country in April 1972 and pledged economic assistance amounting to US\$ 300 million⁴. Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman traveled to the United States in 1974 and met the then U.S. President Gerald Ford. After the 1975 changeover, successive governments of Ziaur Rahman and Hussein Mohammad Ershad forged closer relations with the U.S. With the restoration of democracy in 1991, relations between the United States and Bangladesh evolved from aid dependency to partnerships in trade and security. In the aftermath of September 11, 2001 cataclysmic event, the relationship between the two countries became closer – U.S working with Bangladesh in combating Islamic extremism and terrorism, and was providing hundreds of millions of dollars every year in economic assistance. The United States also assisted Bangladesh during cyclone relief operations. U.S. Marines actively joined Bangladeshi troops in providing relief to thousands of people who suffered as a result of the 1991 Bangladesh Cyclone and Cyclone Sidr in 2007. The people of Bangladesh by and large maintained a very favorable view of U.S. – the majority expressing favorable views – highest rating among the countries in South Asia⁵.

Geopolitics and Mutual Interests

The significance of South Asia for the United States lies in the fact that a peaceful and stable region that joins East Asia's production networks will offer counter point to the predominance of China's economic expansion and produce impetus and resilience to Asia's rise. Two major areas can be discerned in understanding U.S. interests and policies towards Bangladesh in this context. One is often called strategic and economic interests on issues like security, trade and commerce. The other pertains to political issues' that include human rights, governance that includes corruption, political violence, religious extremism, and continuing conflict on modalities of democratic transition. As a partner in development and strategic ally, destabilizing factors in Bangladesh pertaining to above-mentioned issues come seriously on the "rudder" of U.S. foreign policy, security agencies and actors.

3. Influential US lawmakers such as Ted Kennedy, Frank Church and William B. Saxbe were engaged in formulating US public opinion against the Nixon administration.

4. Newsom, Phil (1 June 1972). "U.S. Strives to Improve Relations with Bangladesh". Beaver County Times. Beaver, Pennsylvania, USA. United Press International

5. "Bangladesh-United States Relations, WIKEPEDIA 2014 South Asia Survey; and Pew Global Databases

The United States understands the potential of Bangladesh, first, as the fourth largest populous Muslim majority country in the world; second, the U.S. sees the country emerging as the next "Tiger in Asia"- transiting to a middle-income country if it remains politically stable; and, third, the U.S. values Bangladesh for its geo-political importance as the bridgehead between South and Southeast Asia with a close border to Myanmar and China with two seaports of high potential in the Bay of Bengal. No wonder, U.S. perception of Bangladesh has increasingly become positive and inspirational – a country that shows tremendous success transiting from a poor, developing, authoritarian, military-dominated 'fragile state' to a moderate, aspiring democracy with huge economic potential and strategic significance.

Partnership Dialogue Agreement

Bangladesh-U.S relations took on a new turn with the signing of a "Partnership Dialogue Agreement" in 2012. This heralded a new beginning in bilateral relations between Bangladesh and the United States. The two countries affirmed their "dedication to deepening dialogue in security cooperation, including combating terrorism, violent extremism, and transnational crime, such as narcotics trafficking, piracy and trafficking in persons and arms."⁶ This partnership is deeply rooted in our shared democratic values, our strong economic ties, our mutual security concerns, and our broad and deep people-to-people connections"⁷ The Sixth Partnership Dialogue meeting under Trump administration was held in Dhaka on November 5, 2017 where the U.S. and Bangladesh devoted special attention to trade and security cooperation. The U.S. reiterated its concern expressed by Vice-President Pence and Secretary of State Rex Tillerson regarding the scale of violence on Rohingya, and 'ethnic cleansing' by Myanmar. The United States made commitment to ensure accountability of Myanmar for those actions. There was deep appreciation of generosity in hosting more than 700,000 Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh.

The U.S. also underscored the importance of free trade, sustainable development, rule of law, freedom of navigation and universal values of democracy and human rights. The political landscape in Bangladesh is, however very complex, and reality proves difficult to achieve those desirable democratic goals and process. As a result, the absence of a healthy opposition, as seen in the 2014 national election in Bangladesh, got another jolt in 2018 derailing its democratic process in further. The U.S. State Department voiced concern ahead of the national election, urging greater efforts to ensure a free vote, and followed up after the election with a letter of President Donald Trump that wished Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina success, but asked her to "renew her commitment to protecting human rights, individual freedom of expression and democratic institutions".

6. U.S –Bangladesh Partnership Dialogue, Media Note, office of the Spoke person, Washington DC, May 5, 2012

7. Wendy R. Sherman, U.S. Under Secretary for Political Affairs Wendy R Sherman, "A PARTNERSHIP WITHOUT BOUNDARIES: U.S.-BANGLADESH RELATIONS", Hotel Ruposhi Bangla, Dhaka, May 27, 2013

The United States, notwithstanding, continues its efforts of educating and empowering political party activists and citizens to mitigate political violence, improve understanding of citizens' needs, and turn their political agenda into needed policies and improved services. It has been trying relentlessly to build the capacity of civil society organizations to work in partnership and trust with government to advance good governance. USAID and other agencies often address human rights violations by reducing the high prevalence of violence against women and child marriage, and trying to prevent abductions and tortures. In addition, to enable greater access to the country's formal justice system, USAID educates underserved citizens about existing legal aid services and provides training to the justice sector in order to more serve the public more efficiently. In fact, USAID's Democracy and Governance programs are working to increase citizen confidence in governance institutions by building the country's capacity for democratic political processes, promoting good governance and transparency, protecting human rights, advancing access to justice systems, and supporting a culture of tolerance.

United States has commitment to support Bangladesh to fight corruption, help develop fair and open election processes for democratic transition, as well as deter the spread of religious or ethnic extremism by an inclusive process. In fact, the strategic engagement of the United States in Bangladesh aimed at enhancing cooperation for stability, peace and development. The nature of US-Bangladesh relationships continued as good partners in geo-politics, good friends in economic cooperation and good governance. It is in this context, this 'Partnership Dialogue Agreement' transcended bilateralism, and Bangladesh has been officially taken on in a U.S. South Asian security loop.⁸ Despite rhetoric and inspirational words, the signing of the Partnership Agreement reflected U.S. renewed attraction in Bangladesh that is located at the northern extreme of the Bay of Bengal, part of Indian Ocean, in the evolving strategic dynamics between India and China. This attraction is accentuated by Bangladesh's productive capacity, energy prospects, and regional connectivity and trade routes to China and India. Indeed, China's rise, often neglected as a factor in U.S. South Asia policy, has assumed new significance to U.S. security 'rebalance strategy' to Asia as a whole.⁹ This strategy also envisions "Indo-Pacific Corridor" connecting India, Bangladesh and Myanmar to the major markets of Southeast Asia and beyond.

Trade and Investment Relations

From economic point of view and as a development partner, the US plays a pivotal role. Today, the United States is one of the biggest trade partners of the country. The United

8. U.S. Secretary of Navy Ray Mabus paid a silent visit to Bangladesh to deepen the bilateral security relationship and establish a strategic presence in the Bay of Bengal

9. The rebalance strategy' widely known as the pivot to Asia aims at redeployment of U.S. military assets by expanding partnership and networks with countries of the Asia-Pacific region, including bases. For official position, Hillary Clinton, America's Pacific Century, FOREIGN POLICY, Oct 11, 2011,

States is also one of largest development partners, providing \$6 billion dollars since 1972. The U.S. policy makers have been consistently upbeat in their remarks about Bangladesh which is emerging as an economically vibrant country where business people have been innovative and imaginative in pushing the economic growth consistently above 6% through decades. Today, 60% of Bangladesh's economy is connected with the global economy. It is also a good market for US products as the number of middle class people with disposable incomes is rising. Bangladesh could be an integral part of the New Silk Road envisioned by the US that will connect Central Asia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Nepal, Bhutan, Myanmar and China.¹⁰

Bangladesh is currently 52nd largest goods trading partner of the United States with \$7.2 billion in total (two way) goods trade during 2017. Goods exports totaled \$1.5 billion; goods imports totaled \$5.7 billion. The U.S. goods trade deficit with Bangladesh was \$4.2 billion in 2017.¹¹ According to the Department of Commerce, U.S. exports of goods to Bangladesh supported an estimated 6 thousand jobs in 2015. In the past years the two-way bilateral trade grew 11 percent a year on the average with balance of trade in Bangladesh's favor. The USA is one of the largest export markets for Bangladesh consisting of basically five products i.e. knitwear, woven garments, home textiles, shrimp and fish, and headgear which account for 98 per cent

Exports - Imports

Bangladesh was the United States' 68th largest goods export market in 2017. U.S. goods exports to Bangladesh in 2017 were \$1.5 billion, up 62.7% (\$568 million) from 2016 and up 223.2% from 2007. The top export categories (2-digit HS) in 2017 were: miscellaneous grain, seeds, fruit (soybeans) (\$396 million), cotton (\$288 million), iron and steel (\$188 million), machinery (\$127 million), and cereals (wheat) (\$99 million). U.S. total exports of agricultural products to Bangladesh totaled \$884 million in 2017. Leading domestic export categories include: soybeans (\$391 million), cotton (\$284 million), wheat (\$68 million), soybean meal (\$43 million), and corn (\$31 million).

Bangladesh was the United States' 43rd largest supplier of goods imports in 2017. U.S. goods imports from Bangladesh totaled \$5.7 billion in 2017, down 3.8% (\$223 million) from 2016, but up 65.7% from 2007. The top import categories (2-digit HS) in 2017 were: woven apparel (\$3.5 billion), knit apparel (\$1.4 billion), miscellaneous textile articles (\$222 million), headgear (\$179 million), and footwear (\$102 million). U.S. total imports of agricultural products from Bangladesh totaled \$20 million in 2017. Leading categories include: tobacco

10. Dan W. Mozena,- Bangladesh as the hub of New Silk Road Interview, Dhaka Courier, August 31, 2012; Also, -The New Silk Road and Regional Economic Integration-, Remarks by Robert O. Blake,Jr. Assistant Secretary of State, Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs, Turkic American Convention, Washington, DC March 13, 2013;

11. Office of the United States Trade Representative, South and Central Asia, 2018

(\$7 million), snack foods (\$3 million), rice (\$2 million), spices (\$687 thousand), and tea, including herb (\$517 thousand). The U.S. goods trade deficit with Bangladesh was \$4.2 billion in 2017, a 15.8% decrease (\$792 million) over 2016.

U.S. Goods Trade with Bangladesh (in millions of dollars)

	1995	2000	2007	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Total	1,582.3	2,656.7	3,888.1	5,423.8	6,060.7	6,390.0	6,933.0	6,816.5	7,161.4
Exports	325.1	239.1	456.0	508.2	708.8	1,113.2	942.5	905.7	1,474.0
Imports	1,257.2	2,417.6	3,432.1	4,915.6	5,351.9	5,276.8	5,990.5	5,910.8	5,687.4
Balance	-932.2	-2,178.4	-2,976.1	-4,407.4	-4,643.2	-4,163.5	-5,047.9	-5,005.1	-4,213.5

Source: Office of the U.S. Trade Representative, July 2018

Investment

Foreign Direct Investment in Bangladesh increased by 1706 USD Million in 2017. Foreign Direct Investment in Bangladesh averaged 958.13 U.S. foreign direct investment (FDI) in Bangladesh (stock) was \$460 million in 2017, a 0.4% increase from 2016. There is no information on the distribution of U.S. FDI in Bangladesh. Bangladesh's FDI in the United States (stock) was \$2 million in 2017. There is no information on the distribution of Bangladesh FDI in the U.S. U.S. investments in Bangladesh have focused mainly on the energy and power sectors (79%), the financial sector (insurance, banks, and varied services), along with some in manufacturing. By far, the largest and most important U.S. investor in Bangladesh is Chevron, which has operated three gas fields—Bibiyana, Molvibazar, and Jalalabad—in the Sylhet region for a number of years. Chevron's development of gas fields has increased steadily, and the company now supplies approximately 50% of Bangladesh gas.

Security Cooperation in the Bay

The dynamics of geo-politics drive partnerships in security and economics. No wonder, US-Bangladesh bilateral security cooperation is driven by the perceived convergence of geopolitical interests and economic benefits. The Bay of Bengal, the largest bay in the world forms the northeastern part of the Indian Ocean. It is bordered mostly by India and Sri Lanka to the west, Bangladesh to the north and Myanmar and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands to the east. The principal trade routes for large tankers en route from the Persian Gulf to the Strait of Malacca pass south of the Bay of Bengal.

12. Chevron Bangladesh, Highlights of Operation



Bangladesh has a coastline of 220 nautical miles. Bangladesh shares maritime boundary with India and Myanmar in the Bay of Bengal. The maritime boundary disputes with Myanmar has been resolved by the International Tribunal for Law of the Sea (ITLOS) judgment on March 14, 2012 in which Bangladesh and Myanmar were awarded 111,631 and 171,832 square kilometers respectively. It is also noteworthy that the Arbitration Tribunal on the India-Bangladesh Maritime Delimitation delivered its ruling on 7th July 2014 resolving the dispute between the two countries. The Tribunal was set up under the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague, in the matter of the Bay of Bengal Maritime Boundary Delimitation between India and Bangladesh. In 838,600 square mile area of the Bay, security threats of the littoral states including Bangladesh range from disputes over exclusive economic zones to terrorism, piracy, poaching, over-fishing, and trafficking of humans, arms, and narcotics. U.S. security ties with Bangladesh get salience in this context. U.S. realized that Bangladesh adjoined by the Bay in the Indian Ocean should not be totally under either the Indian sphere of influence or that of China. In fact, Washington also wants a stable Bangladesh, as any power vacuum in this 'fragile'¹³ state created by political and economic chaos resulting in upsetting the status quo is not in US interest. Therefore, US security assistance program can have tremendous impact in supporting states like Bangladesh trying to build their security capacity. No doubt, in an interconnected world, terrorists, pirates, traffickers, and other transnational actors can exploit the weakness of states to cause mayhem and instability. Andrew J. Shapiro, US Assistant Secretary of State said this in very clear terms, "Our assistance is helping states like Bangladesh better control

13. Bangladesh is in the list of 'fragile' states that "lack the ability to develop mutually constructive relations with society and often have a weak capacity to carry out basic governance functions", OECD, Fragile States: 2013

their borders and their coastlines...and better deal with natural disasters and transnational threats ...through our training initiatives and exchanges we are helping professionalize national military forces to ensure they can better protect their public, while respecting human rights".¹⁴

In fact, US maintain a positive perception of Bangladesh to become a key player in maintaining security in Bay of Bengal. As one strategic analyst points out, "While US relations with India "may not progress as quickly as desired and those with Pakistan and Afghanistan are "in tatters," the United States needs to forge deeper strategic relationship with the "marginal states, like Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Myanmar."¹⁵ "Such states," according to Doug Lieb in the Harvard International Review, "are often overlooked in a structural realist world view that privileges the study of larger countries."¹⁶ In broader perspective, therefore, three clear interests bind Bangladesh and the United States in the Bay: First, the Indian Ocean is the central highway for international commerce particularly between the oil-rich Gulf States and an economically dynamic East Asia, and it in this context, Bangladesh shares interest with the US and other littoral states for the safety and security of the sea-route. In fact Bangladesh's 90 percent goods pass through this route from its two ports: Chittagong and Mongla; Second, Bangladesh's urgency to have access, explore and harness hydro-carbon resources and marine fisheries within its rightful zone for national development; and Third, China-India strategic competition that has significant implications for Bangladesh's security and continued development.

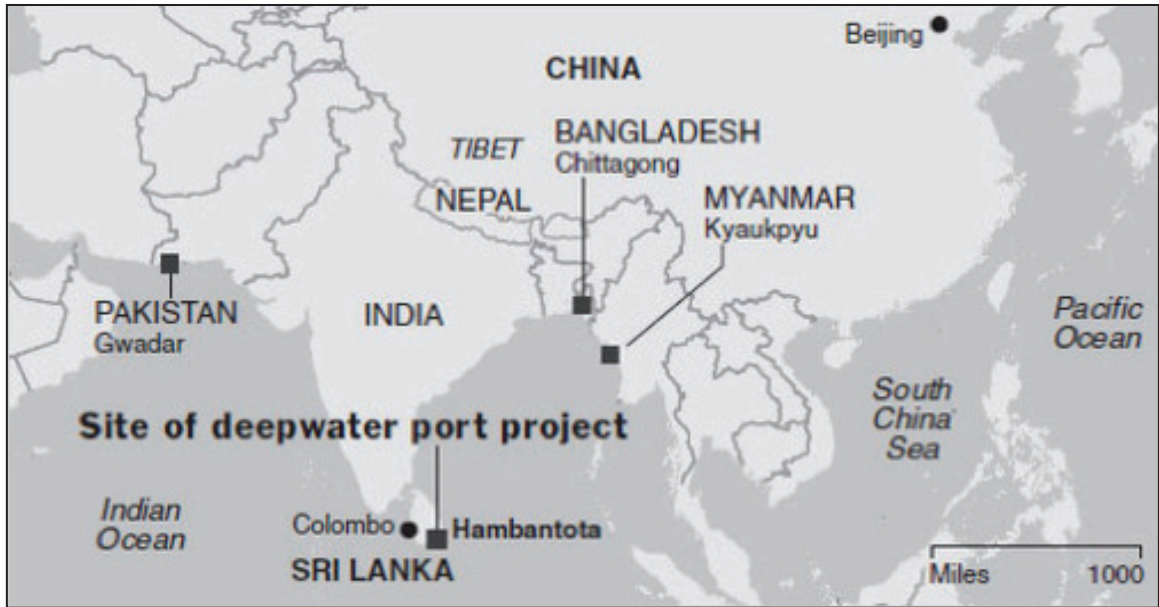
Connectivity, energy and economic Activity

While US interest to maintain the Indian Ocean as a secure highway for international commerce remains paramount in her global strategy, the harbors on the eastern zone of the Ocean are fast transforming the economic geography of Asia. This has recently been pointed out by the Economist Magazine in a feature that highlighted how India was building a large new terminal beside the old harbor in Sittwe (Akyab) as a joint project between India and Myanmar. Taking advantage of the port's site at the mouth of the river Kaladan, which empties into the Bay of Bengal, India hopes to open its own landlocked and impoverished north-eastern states. But that is only one of many ambitious ventures underway along the eastern half of the Bay of Bengal. In fact, booming Asian economies have long since outgrown their ports. Sprawling Kolkata, for instance, the oldest colonial port on the Bay of Bengal, has been unable to take in bigger modern vessels for years. It lies 144 miles inland up the river Hooghly, which has gradually silted up. Local and national governments have approved the construction of a new deepwater port on Sagar island at

14 Andrew J. Shapiro, US Assistant Secretary of Political-Military Affairs Andrew J. Shapiro who led the American delegation to Bangladesh in the first ever Security Dialogue between the two countries in Dhaka on April 19, 2012

15 Nilanthi Samaranayake, The Long Littoral Project: Bay of Bengal, CNA Analysis and Solutions, September, 2012

16 Doug Lieb, "The Limits of Neo-realism: marginal states and International Relations Theory, Harvard International Review, July 2005



the mouth of the Hooghly at a cost of 80 billion rupees (\$1.5 billion).¹⁷ Bangladesh's Chittagong, the biggest port on this side of the bay, faced with huge bottlenecks, started its modernization process with hopes of further growth on the site of a vast new deepwater container terminal to its south.

Myanmar's opening, however, overshadows the rest. Its new government, keen for foreign inflows to help rebuild the economy, has been approving projects that sat idle for years. Sittwe is one, but it looks small compared with the Dawei project on Myanmar's Tenasserim coast. This is a Thai-aided deepwater port that includes an industrial zone and highways to connect it with distant Bangkok, estimated to cost \$8.5 billion. The Chinese are exploring ways round their own Malacca-strait dilemma. They have been building new oil and gas pipelines across the whole of Myanmar starting from a new port-terminal at Kyaukphyu, near Sittwe. The lines run through Mandalay to Ruili on the border and beyond to Kunming, the capital of Yunnan province. In commercial terms, the trans-shipment terminals of Malaysia and Singapore could lose out. But Sukh Deo Muni of Singapore's Institute of South Asian Studies, reckons they "would not necessarily suffer, as the new connectivity will generate more economic activity".¹⁷

China-India Rivalry

As for the strategic rivalry between China and India, there are divergent opinions. S.D. Muni argues that China's activities in the Bay of Bengal are purely "defensive". But Indians versed in the "string of pearls" theory, which sees Chinese-built ports encircling India, are not to be much comforted. They argue that China's economic and security interests have resulted in

17. S.D. Muni, *India and the Security of Asia*, ISAS, National University of Singapore, 2012

a greater Chinese presence in the Indian Ocean region, much to the concern of India. China has cultivated economic relationships with littoral countries of the Bay through infrastructure projects such as port development, power plant construction, and railway and road building. Indian strategic planners worry that Chinese influence in these Indian Ocean outposts could turn them into military bases that would enable China to “encircle” India. However, a single-minded focus on these sites as likely nodes of Chinese influence does not capture the entire story, because the rationale behind these developments is more economic than strategic. Beijing is trying to connect its western provinces to the global economy by constructing lines of communication south to the Bay of Bengal. That said, there are strategic concerns at work as well.¹⁸

India is undertaking a major modernization of its navy with increasing bilateral and multilateral naval ties in the Bay of Bengal. Partly in response to China and partly as a power rising on the world stage, India has begun upgrading its tri-service Andaman and Nicobar (A&N) Command, allocating greater resources to the Eastern Naval Command (located along India’s Bay of Bengal coast), and increasing navy-to-navy ties through forums such as the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium and the MILAN exercise.¹⁹ The strongest manifestation of Sino-Indian rivalry in the Bay of Bengal has been in Myanmar. This is due to the confluence of both countries’ domestic and strategic interests in a neighbor that both Beijing and New Delhi want as a friend: a political friend as well as a neighbor that can provide them with access to the Bay of Bengal (from Yunnan province in China and from India’s northeastern states). While strategic concerns still animate both China and India, both countries are actually pursuing the same objective—access through Myanmar so that their landlocked underdeveloped areas can develop economically. Finally, China has already established several footholds in the Indian Ocean region (the so-called “string of pearls” strategy) which India cannot roll back. While Chinese involvement in ports such as Sittwe in Myanmar and Hambantota in Sri Lanka do not seem to have for primary purpose an encirclement of India but rather ensuring that China has the ability to secure its own energy supply lines, India feels evident discomfort with China’s growing footprint so close to its shores, in its “backyard”.²⁰

U.S. cooperating with Bangladesh Navy

The Bay is the life line for Bangladesh. It is important both for security as well commerce. As the naval arm of Bangladesh Armed Forces, Bangladesh Navy is entrusted to safeguard “the sovereignty over the internal waters & territorial sea, and sovereign rights over the Contiguous Zone, Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and Continental Shelf of Bangladesh

18. Michael J. Green and Andrew Shearer, *Defining U.S. Indian Ocean Strategy*, The Washington Quarterly, Spring 2012

19. David Brewster, ‘An Indian Sphere of Influence in the Indian Ocean?’ *Security Challenges* 6, No. 3 (Spring 2010); Indian Ocean Naval Symposium,
http://indiannavy.nic.in/ions/welcome_to_ions_website_new.htm

20. Howard Chua-Eoan, “Beyond Pirates: On the High Seas, an Indian-China Rivalry,” *Time*, April 8, 2009,

"While in reality, Bangladesh navy's role is mainly coastal patrolling, it is implementing an ambitious procurement and expansion program to ensure the security of Bangladesh's maritime boundary which includes the country's vast exclusive economic zone, deep sea oil, gas and mineral reserves, and vital shipping lanes in the Bay of Bengal. The Bangladesh Navy is undergoing major transformation since last decade. The US provided a Coast Guard cutter ship and 16 high speed boats to augment Bangladesh Navy and Coast Guard capability to protect the EEZ. The 'Jarvis' was the fourth in its class of High Endurance Cutters which is designed to provide better sea-keeping and higher sustained transit speeds, greater endurance and range, and the ability to launch and recover small boats, as well as support aviation facilities with a flight deck for helicopters and unmanned aerial vehicles. Since first receiving Foreign Military Financing or FMF in 2005, Bangladesh has focused on building patrol boat fleets for the Coast Guard—a project that supports maritime security and disaster relief and strengthens the government's presence in isolated areas. Bangladesh has been working through a military modernization plan, which includes looking to partners for affordable defense systems, especially to supply its Special Operations Forces and disaster relief equipment. "This modernization effort provides an opportunity for U.S. to expand its security cooperation, especially through "Excess Defense Articles Program",²¹ which makes US equipment that is surplus to their requirements available to partners.

Support to Disaster and Relief operations

It has been estimated that nearly 53 percent of the recorded world deaths due to cyclones occurred in Bangladesh. But Bangladesh Navy's capability to respond to such disasters was limited. U.S. support in this respect was very helpful to expanding its ability to respond to disasters. In 2007, the US Navy deployed two warships, 20 helicopters, 3,500 marines, Army medical teams, and US Air Force C-130 aircraft for emergency relief support, medical and emergency evacuation.²² The non-traditional security challenge of natural disasters and climate change in the Bay of Bengal is important for Bangladesh to address effectively as the entire Bay region is particularly vulnerable to sudden changes in the weather – including cyclones, flash floods, and landslides – as well as to long-term shifts in climate, leading to rising sea levels and Tsunami. U.S helped in building of 130 cyclone shelters were going and 30 of them would be coastal crisis management centers. The centers would be prominently manned by Bangladesh Coast Guard. There will be facilities for land transportation, boat transportation and cyclone-proof communication capabilities."²³. Admiral Haney said they were working with Bangladesh solely on 'partnership built upon

21. Defense articles and military equipment that are no longer needed by the U.S. armed forces are eligible for transfer to foreign countries under section 516 of the Foreign Assistance Act (FAA) of 1961

22. US PACOM press release <http://www.pacom.mil/news/news/2007-bangladesh-pr009p.shtml>

23. Dan Mozena's Remarks during his visit on January 15, 2003

years of working together.”²⁴ Citing successes of Bangladesh and U.S. maritime partnership that resulted in improved capabilities of the Coast Guards to respond to robbery, which was why the incidence of robbery that declined 70 percent on Chittagong coast. The military to military partnership is especially strong and productive. “Working together, America and Bangladesh have strengthened Bangladesh’s ability to secure its maritime borders from piracy, terrorism, trafficking of people, drugs, and arms ... Bangladesh can now better protect its fish and other resources in the Bay of Bengal.”²⁵

Conclusion: Challenging Future

Bangladesh and the United States have been friends since 1972. Today, the stakes are greater as they become new partners in a very critical time of change in both countries. Bangladesh faces a tremendous challenge. It has set an ambitious goal of becoming a middle income country by 2021- the 50 years of its birth. To achieve middle income status, it will require an average annual GDP growth of 7.5% - 8%. The country has to provide jobs for the 20 million young people set to join the labor force over the next decade. The U.S is also faced with global challenges of providing leadership, crafting new trade practices, ensuring security in various parts of the world, sustaining global development, and promoting values of democracy and good governance. A durable and robust U.S.-Bangladesh relationship can, therefore, only emerge from a clear understanding of economic, political and mutual security needs and interests. Bangladesh has made significant strides in economic development in the past decade. But the challenge of internal governance looms large, and democratic consolidation faces uncertainties posing risks to security and continued economic development of the country. The Rohingya crisis which is imposed on Bangladesh by the neighboring Myanmar has created enormous insecurity and anxieties. The U.S. is the leading contributor to this humanitarian response, and provided \$449 million since the outbreak of violence in Myanmar in August 2017.

Unmistakably, America is our friend and vital to our prosperity and security in the future. Bangladesh today is connected to outside world as never before. Ninety percent of the country’s economy is linked globally, and our people spread across the world. At a time when the Asia-Pacific region is building a new security and economic architecture, Bangladesh foreign policy must adapt to new realities and build web of partnerships and engagements with nations that matter especially the United States. But a nation can only globalize or gain from bilateral realtions from its position of strength – the strength of its democratic institutions, quality of leadership, and creative potential of the people.²⁶ As

24. Dan Mozena’s Remarks

25. SWADS a Special Warfare Diving & Salvage Force of Bangladesh Navy capable of undertaking missions for anti-piracy, counterterrorism and other criminal activities in the sea organized along the lines of US Seals.

26. Susan J. Tolchin, *The Angry American – How Voter Rage is Changing the Nation* (1996, 2nd ed. 1998),

Bangladesh moves forward, the nation therefore, needs to focus on the steps to be taken at home– improve democratic credential, overcome partisan divisions, ensure safety in work places, and strengthen governance. The nation’s most potent asset is the human power that needs to be infused with character and skills on which depends the success of its external engagements. It is in this context, Bangladesh has much to gain from her partnership with the United States in years ahead.

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