CHAPTER-IV

BANGLADESH-UNITED STATES MILITARY RELATIONS
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Bangladesh and the US at present as viewed by Bangladesh’s defense analysis and foreign policy experts, enjoy a healthy relationship. US-Bangladesh defense cooperation increased considerably following Bangladesh’s participation in the Gulf War, where it was an ally of US led multinational front. During that period it posted a contingent in Haiti.

Now, there are joint defense exercises and seminars held at different levels between the two countries. Bangladesh military officers are trained by the US. Bangladesh also makes defense purchases from the US – both from the Defense department as well as commercial sources. Further testimony to the increased cooperation between the two countries comes from the fact that they have entered into a number of agreements. Few of them are mentioned below:

a. joint military exercises;

b. participation in US Security Assistance Programme;

c. exchange of military delegations; and

d. procurement of military equipment from commercial sources.

Since 1991, US has held as many as 26 joint military exercises, two of which were held recently in 1998.¹ On 5 July 1998, a Memorandum of

Understanding (MoU) was signed between the US Peace Corps and Bangladesh government to implement peace corps programs in Bangladesh. The first 25 peace corps volunteers were sent in November 1998 to Primary Training Institution around the country to enhance English language training for primary school teachers of Bangladesh. The second group of 35 peace corps volunteers also reached Dhaka recently during February 2000.

Increased cooperation is also a consequence of the fact that Bangladesh appreciates the leading role of the US for establishing world peace and stability. Besides, Bangladesh also reiterated its continued support for the US in areas of shared interest, as it also shares similar perception in regional and international peace and security issues. This is amply demonstrated by its contribution, howsoever modest, to the UN peacekeeping operations, which prompted the former US President Bill Clinton to express his appreciation for Bangladesh's role in peacekeeping efforts around the world. The same concern prompted it to sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT).

So, Bangladesh relations with the US, present, are excellent. In the words of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina Wajed, they have no intractable problems or irritants and the relationship during the past four years has

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3 Ibid., January-March 2000, p.22.
4 Joint Press Statements by US ex-President Bill Clinton during his Bangladesh visit on 20 March 2000, Bangladesh Document, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Bangladesh.
undergone a qualitative transformation from one of donor-recipients to partners in progress.⁵

To find out the underlying causes for this qualitative transformation in relationship we will have to find that how this evolved over the years.

**US-Pak Relations during 1947-65**

From 1947 to 1971, Bangladesh was part of Pakistan and known as East Pakistan. So American policy or strategic interest in South Asia was dealt on that basis. The post Second World War began with significant changes in the global power structure, which resulted further in changing the power equations at regional level. At the global level, the US became "super power" with its atomic monopoly, whereas the UK, which was dominating during the pre-war period, became merely a power. Meanwhile, the Soviet Union was trying to break the atomic monopoly of the United States. At the regional level there emerged a number of new nations, that had earlier been under colonial rules. With UK no more powerful enough to dominate at the global level, "the historical necessity thrust upon" the US "the burden of responsibility" of maintaining peace and stability in the unipolar world. But the US expected British to do the same at least in the regions; which were under its control and by implication in South Asia. At the same time the US did not find this region important for its strategic interests, which is clear from the

reports of State Department Committee on the Near East and South Asia.6

The US did not realize the significance of the region despite Pakistan trying to influence American strategic interests by posing itself as strategically significant by playing communism card. The only concession that Pakistan could extract was in 1949, when the STATE-ARMY-NAVY-AIR FORCE COORDINATING COMMITTEE (SANACC) put the region in priority number 4 implying limited degree of assistance.7

Later, in 1950 American perception changed with three major events that shaped US’s interest in South Asian region. The first was Soviet Union detonating its atomic bomb, thus ending American atomic monopoly, second was emergence of a communist regime in China and the third was outbreak of Korean War. In American policy maker’s minds only Pakistan appeared to be occupying strategic position and which was ready to welcome them. This is evident from the memorandum of Joint Chief of Staff dated 24th March 1949

"From the military point of view, the countries of South Asia, excepting Pakistan have little value to the United States.... The Karachi-Lahore area in Pakistan may under certain conditions become of strategic importance. In spite of tremendous logistic difficulties, this area might be required as a base for air operations against central USSR and as


7 SANACC 360/11, Military and priorities, Report by the SANACC, Subcommittee on Rearmament, 18 August 1940, quoted in R.K. Jain (ed.), n.6, p.12.
a staging area of forces engaged in the defense or recapture of Middle East areas.\(^8\)

Later, India's non-alignment policy, its stand on Korean war and its refusal to sign the peace treaty at San Francisco tilted US towards Pakistan, which was willing to follow the American path towards global issues.

By 1952, the changes in the governments in both the countries – Pakistan and the US – facilitated this alliance. John Foster Dulles, the new Secretary of State, a strong proponent of the policy of containment, realized the significance of strategic location of Pakistan for the US. According to him, "Pakistan occupies a strategic location. Communist China borders northern territories held by Pakistan and from Pakistan's northern border one can see the Soviet-Union Pakistan flanks Iran and the Middle East and guards the Khyber Pass, the historical invasion route from the north into the subcontinent."

The US needed an "immediate factor" that could provoke it to consolidate the alliance very fast. Besides by this time Dulles was convinced of the Pakistani leaders sincerity. He stated "one of my clearest impression was that of the outstanding and sincere friendship which the leaders of Pakistan feel for the United States."\(^9\) Even before this Dulles had stated

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\(^8\) Memorandum of the Joint Chief of Staff, 24 March 1949, quoted in R.K. Jain (ed.), n.6, p.15.

about the importance of military aid to Pakistan, in building a 'northern tier of countries' against the Soviet Union.

Despite criticisms and warnings on the proposed alliance, the US went ahead and concluded the US-Mutual Defense agreement on 19 May 1954. The military aid under this agreement greatly upset the balance in the Indian subcontinent. In a statement, the then Prime Minister of India Jawaharlal Nehru said, "If any military aid comes to Pakistan... it means that the cold war comes to Pakistan and therefore comes to India's borders on the West and East on both sides."10

Simultaneously, with the military aid there was an opinion being formed to review the US policy towards Pakistan. According to James M. Langley, the then US Ambassador to Pakistan –

"Military strength, without a sound economic and political base does not constitute real strength in South Asia or elsewhere. It is time to rethink our approach to the Pakistan problem...."11

Langley strengthened his argument by suggesting –

"the present military programme (to Pakistan) is based on a hoax, the hoax being that it is related to the Soviet threat...."12

However, the US did not stop the military aid fearing that stoppage or slowing down this aid might make Pakistan move away from its anti-

10 Nehru, in Lok Sabha, 25 December 1953.
11 Langley to Department of State, 1 November 1957, Foreign Relations of United States 1955-1957, 8:484-86.
12 Ibid., 27 December 1957, 8:487-90.
Communist, pro-West policy. Report of Deputy Chief of Mission at the US Embassy in Pakistan mentioned –

"Failure by the US to fulfill its commitments could jeopardize the US’s political position in the area... it could lead Pakistan to retreat from its present anti-communist, pro-western policy."\(^{13}\)

This observation is confirmed by the speech of Feroz Khan Noon, the then Prime Minister of Pakistan, made in the Pakistani Parliament in March 1959 –

"I hear rumblings (the Americans) probably want to stop our military aid.... I am sure if they do that it will be under pressure from India. I can tell the world, if our people find their freedom threatened by India, they will break all pacts to save freedom and will shake hands with those whom we have made our enemies for the sake of others."\(^{14}\)

But, US also wanted to prevent India falling under communist influence. To come out of this dilemma US tried to make India and Pakistan agree to evolve a Common Defense Program. The incentive for India in this was (a) reduced military aid to Pakistan and (b) increase in the economic aid to India. To secure this US even pressurized Pakistan, which is evident from the suggestion of Ayub Khan –

"In the event of an external threat both India and Pakistan should defend the subcontinent in cooperation with each other."\(^{15}\)

\(^{13}\) Ridgway B. Knight, Deputy Chief of Mission at the US Embassy in Pakistan to Department of State, 6 June 1958. Quoted in Robert J. McMohan, op. cit.


\(^{15}\) Quoted in Sisir Gupta, *India and Regional Integration in Asia* (Bombay, 1964).
Later, he further said --

"The Indian subcontinent can be defended territorially and ideologically only by joint efforts of India and Pakistan. Pakistan would be willing to participate with India in a scheme of joint defense of the subcontinent if the impediments to such joint action are eliminated."\(^{16}\)

Nehru rejected the idea. He said, "I do not understand when people say: 'let us have a common defense policy.' Against whom?"\(^{17}\)

But the US was aware of the presence and influence of other superpower in the region, as indicated by American uneasiness over Moscow's salvage work in Chittagong port. The US involvement in Bangladesh was partially motivated by the desire to counter Moscow's influence in the region. Therefore the US felt that it "ought to pursue quietly, not with publicity" to get the two countries to have a common defense policy.\(^{18}\)

Extra pressure by US bore some fruits when both the countries signed Indus Water Treaty in September 1960. The US hailed the agreement by terming it "development of immense significance not only for Indo-Pakistan relations but for the relations of both the countries with the United States."\(^{19}\)

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\(^{16}\) The Hindu, 3 May 1959.

\(^{17}\) Ibid., 6 May 1959.


\(^{19}\) Ibid.
The beginning of 1960s witnessed, India assuming strategic importance in American framework. Two major factors were responsible for such a change. First in the 1960 presidential elections of the United States John F. Kennedy became President. Kennedy, during the late 1950s, was vehemently criticizing the Eisenhower administration's decision to have military alliance with Pakistan.

The second factor, more important than the first, that made India significant in the strategic framework of the United States was the India-China war, that erupted on 20 October 1962. The Indo-China war was considered as a "golden opportunity for a major gain" in their relations with India. The United States, much before the Indian requests for the US military aid, felt that Indo-China war had brought India to reality, hence would force India to abandon its policy of non-alignment and would seek for US military assistance. 

The NSC subcommittee on South Asia noted that the Indo-China war, "can give us a major break through in Asia, provided we can find ways to help India stand firm against the Chinese, without disrupting our relationships with Pakistan." This resulted in the American military aid to India.

20 Memorandum prepared by the Office of Far Eastern Affairs,, 3 November 1962, folder: Trips & Missions, India-Pakistan, Box 533, Harriman papers, quoted in Robert J. Macmohan.

21 NSC Subcommittee on South Asia to NSC, NSC files, National Security Folder, John F. Kennedy Library.
In 1963, the emergence of close relations between China and Pakistan did upset the American strategic interests in the region. By the end of 1962 itself the Americans came to know about the proposed visit of Chou Enlai to Pakistan. Lyndon Johnson in a letter to Ayub Khan told:

"Regardless of Pakistan's motivations, which I understand but frankly cannot agree with, these actions undermine our efforts to uphold our common security interests in the face of an aggressive nation which has clearly and most explicitly announced its unswerving hostility to the West."

The US relations with both India and Pakistan touched all time low, with the outbreak of India-Pakistan war in 1965. The use of US military items on both the sides made the United States to take certain drastic measures in the region.

The 1965 war marked a watershed in US-South Asian Policy. Washington disgusted by the 1965 war because the US had contributed billions of dollars of military and economic assistance so that countries of South Asia could achieve economic development, political stability and to contain communism in the region. Up to this period, India received $10 billion in economic assistance, whereas Pakistan had got $30 million for military and $4 billion in economic assistance. Instead, both countries used US assistance, especially the military assistance, against each other. The Congress opposition to any aid to both the countries reached its zenith. As could be seen from James A. Haley's speech in the Congress, "The situation...

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22 Johnson to Ayub, 9 December 1963, NSC, History of South Asia, National Security Folder, Lyndon, B. Johnson Library.
as it stands today has made us look ridiculous in the eyes of the entire world.... The blunt truth is that the hundreds of millions of dollars we have given to these countries have equipped them to mount war against each other.\textsuperscript{23}

The US government, on 8 September announced its decision to half arms shipment to both the countries – India and Pakistan. The 1965 war between India and Pakistan was significant, in the sense that, it made the American policy makers to rethink and reconstitute the American interests and the policies towards the region.

The serious thinking of the United States regarding the strategic importance of the South Asian region led to realization that it had less security interests in the region and Lyndon Johnson came to the conclusion that the US strategic interests in the region were greatly exaggerated. A report by the Near Eastern Affairs mentioned that the India-Pakistan war and in its aftermath urged US to adopt a low profile in the region. This could be seen from the simple fact that Johnson agreed to Soviets mediating between India and Pakistan. It should be remembered that following that proclamation of cease-fire between India and Pakistan, Soviet Union offered its good offices to arrive at a solution.

\textsuperscript{23} Congressional Record, 87\textsuperscript{th} Congress, 1st Session, 8 September 1965, 23059-60.
Thus by the end of 1965, the American strategic interest in the region came to form a full cycle. The American strategic interests in the region appeared to be that of during 1947-1948 that the region is situated on the other hand, where the American interests are only marginal.

In April 1967, a new arms policy for India and Pakistan was announced. The aim of this policy was to limit the arms acquisition by both the countries and to encourage them to give higher priority to economic development. During 1966-69, the US leverage on the subcontinent was at perhaps its lowest in spite of nearly $21 billion of economic and military assistance to India and Pakistan. India was still closer to the Soviet Union, and the US military ally, Pakistan was in the process of disengaging itself from military pacts, such as CENTO and SEATO. It also closed the military base at Badabar, which had been granted to the United States during the heyday of the US-Pakistan military alliance in 1950s.24

The Struggle for Liberation, Indo-Pak 1971 War and the United States

In the intervening period between 1965 and 1971, when America was not giving enough importance to the region and East Pakistan was burning, Pakistan tried to suppress the rebellion militarily. The Indian government pleaded to stop the killings and requested the US and China, which had come closer to Pakistan with the reduced American role to pressurize Pakistan to

stop killing, but to its utter dismay it found the US indirectly supporting Pakistan in suppressing Bangladesh Liberation War, though it was giving humanitarian help to Bangladesh through UN agencies.

The East Pakistan problem was troublesome for India as thousands of Bangladeshi migrants were coming to India as refugees. In this scenario India found itself alone and therefore signed a treaty with USSR in August 1971 to help it out in case of involvement of other powers in the problem. After the treaty, USSR openly threatened the US and China and asked them to keep away from the region.

Soon before the outbreak of war, America sent its seventh fleet in the Bay of Bengal and started its protest opening against the division of Pakistan. The reasons for American stance were manifold – East Pakistan leaders opposed any military alliance like CENTO, SEATO, etc. In American opinion India was a regional power only, but division of Pakistan could tilt the balance of power in its favour. Further, any democratic government was not in the interest of the US policy in South Asia. Moreover, the US wanted to take advantage of Sino-Soviet border dispute to become friendly with China and for that Pakistan was the only conduit, which was manifested in Nixon-Kissinger China Rapprochement Policy.

After the war, Bangladesh became an independent country by defeating Pakistan with the help of India and the Soviet Union. So its tilt towards USSR was natural and in fact the US influence was totally excluded. More so, as the US was not willing to recognize the newly created state.
US Defense Relations with Bangladesh

However, it was not possible for the US to accept this position for long and after sometime the US government began to follow a more positive policy with the ultimate objective of eliminating or reducing Soviet and Indian influence in Bangladesh and winning this small but strategically important country over its side.

Bangladesh-US defense relations developed in this background. Any country's defense related requirements mainly depend on the threat perception of the country. Bangladesh's national security was never under threat by its neighbouring countries in the beginning, where it is important to note that most of its boundary is along India and only a small portion touch Myanmar. To be precise, Bangladesh share 1550 miles with India and 123 miles with Burma. Nonetheless, Bangladesh wanted to acquire effective defense capability, which was mainly due to its sense of insecurity.

National Security of Bangladesh

Security is amongst the prime concerns of any nation state. The problem is complicated for states which have the least national capabilities especially the newly independent ones. In case of Bangladesh, poverty, malnutrition, increasing unemployment and underemployment, rising external debt and dependence are recurrent issues that threaten its security. Md. Nuruzzaman raises valid questions when he asks: “what does security-oriented security strategy applicable to its security needs; what are the sources of its insecurity and how menacing they are? To what extent do the
prevailing sources of threats undermine its security? What strategies, both in internal and external contexts, should it follow to preserve and strengthen its national security?25

Walter Lippmann says 'a nation is secure to the extent to which it is not in danger of having to sacrifice core values, if it wishes to avoid was and is able, if challenged, to maintain them by such victory in such a war.26 According to Arnold Wolfers, Lippmann's definition "security rises and falls with the ability of a nation to deter an attack or to defeat it."27

A state's security is heavily dependent upon its geopolitical environment. Geopolitical setting may either help augment national capabilities or increases the vulnerability of a state vis-a-vis its adversaries.

However, it was in the interest of US that it had close defense relationship with Bangladesh as it apprehended that Bangladesh could give Chittagong Hill Tract (CHT) to USSR to establish military base. Moreover, Bangladesh could not have survived without the US economic aid. But the US desire to have close relationship was also viewed with suspicion, amply illustrated by the rumours that the US was seeking a base in Chittagong on St. Martin Island. The rumours were so strong that the US had to clarify that

it had no such interest and a naval base expert with experience in the Bay of Bengal confirmed that "it would be a poor area in which to plant a base as channels do not permit large ships and channel courses to Indian Ocean are problematic." So much so that spokesman of the Foreign Ministry of Bangladesh denied a report in 'Ittefaq' that Bangladesh was permitting the base, in the issue of 18th December 1986. He said that

"It was absolutely baseless and there was no truth in the report that a foreign country was permitted to build a naval base on the St. Martin's Island (160 km. from the southern coast in the Bay of Bengal). Bangladesh did not even contemplate to permit the construction of any kind of military base in its territory since this was against its national policy."

In fact Bangladesh was not apprehensive of the powers which had opposed its independence, Bangladesh was feeling in some quarters that after ten years of independence it was faced with external threats not from those who originally opposed it, but from those who supported it directly and significantly during the liberation struggle. This was probably due to the attitude of India at that point of time. A number of factors can be identified behind Bangladesh's perception of India as a threat. Some of these factors are directly related to fundamental principles of Indian foreign policy and others are creation of specific situations in Indo-Bangladesh relations. First, since independence, India despite taking persistent moralistic overtures, India has actually practiced the opposite, evident by policies adopted towards its neighbors in the sub-continent, with regard to its immediate and vital

28 The Ittefaq, 18 December 1986.
interests, India is generally seen as a hardliner and uncompromising in projecting its influence and power.\textsuperscript{29}

In neighbours' eyes India's prime objective in the sub-continent revolves around the acceptance of its paramount position in South Asia's economic, political and security systems from both the major external powers and the other states in the region. The mechanism through which India preferred to attain this objective was its insistence on bilateral relations with the neighbours which could involve them into Indian economic and security systems in a cooperative but inevitably subordinate relationship.\textsuperscript{30}

Another factor, which has created anti-Indian feelings and threat perceptions not only in Bangladesh but all other South Asian countries, is its tendency to intervene in the domestic affairs of its neighbours on the ground of maintaining stable regional political system. This was reflected further well by the comments of Indian leading strategic analyst K. Subrahmanyam. In 1971, he wrote, 'there is not the same risk of the Chinese cutting off Assam as there was in 1962, since in the course of hostilities, the northern Bangladesh is likely to be overrun by the Indian forces and the communication lines with Assam will be broadened rather than narrowed.

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\textsuperscript{30} Ibid.
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down or closed. Problems were compounded with the signing of Bangladesh India Friendship Treaty. Article 10 of this treaty stipulates that in case of an attack or threat of an attack the 'high contracting parties shall immediately enter into mutual consultation in order to take appropriate effective measures to eliminate the threat.' In view of Indian relationship with China, it could ask the right of passage through Bangladesh territory in case of Chinese attack. As Bangladesh had earned the friendship of China in post-August 1975, it would not have been in its national interest to help India against China. Traditional Hindu-Muslim rivalry and India's rigid posture on issues like Farakka, South Talpatty Island and the boundary dispute distanced the two neighbours further. Thus Bangladesh became sceptical of the Indian domination.

More so, because of its geo-political situation as in the south it has access to Bay of Bengal. But the funnel like shape of the Bay led to a dispute with India over the question of delimitation of maritime boundary complicating the identification of its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). As the disputed area was perceived to have a potential of a 10 mile oil bearing belt

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34 Akamal Hussain, n.33, pp.99-100.
and mineral rich because of delta sedimentation, a conflict with India arose in 1974 when the government of Bangladesh signed production sharing contracts with six foreign oil companies granting them extraction rights. It became problematic for both to ascertain the basis on which to decide their areas of authority in the sea. Bangladesh's advantage was further constrained by India's growing naval strength, which had emerged as the dominant naval power in the region by commissioning Andaman as naval base and adding nuclear powered submarines and new aircraft carriers. Bangladesh was no match for Indian navy in protecting its interests in the sea. Following the withdrawal of the British from the East of Suez in 1968, the Indian ocean had been the theatre of superpower conflicts. This control of the ocean led to incessant military build ups in and around the area and had its repercussions on the South Asia region.\footnote{Md. Nuruzzaman, n.30, p.380.} To thwart this situation, policy makers of Bangladesh believed that any political support from the US could be used as leverage against possible threats from India. During those days, it was useful for a smaller state to have the backing of a superpower. The lack of superpower strategic interests in Bangladesh increased its 'vulnerability to the strategic requirements of India that seeks the exclusion of outside powers' involvement in South Asia.

Since, there was realization that US-Pak military alliance proved to be a total failure because there was no reciprocity in the relationship, the policy
makers tried to make Bangladesh-US relationship based on reciprocal interests. They believed that a viable relationship could emerge only from a clear understanding of their mutual security needs. It perceived that Bangladesh surrounded by India on three sides needed US to deter India and the US needed to continue to provide effective support to prevent it coming under the influence of communism. By effective support they meant healthy economy and stable polity. But they also believed that political stability could be maintained through close cooperation between the military and civilians. Thus a politically stable and economically viable Bangladesh, with a strong Bangladeshi Islamic polity, could offset Indian expansionism on one hand and on the other could help the US to pursue its traditional goal of checking communism.

However, there was suspicion also in the minds of policy makers about the reliability of US in helping its allies in times of crisis. To ensure this reliability, they wanted the US to first draw up and articulate a specific South Asian policy, for they attributed the failure of US against increased Soviet influence in the area to the absence of a clear the US policy toward South Asia. Meanwhile, they made it clear that any military base on the territory of Bangladesh did not correspond to the geo-political realities of the 1980s, primarily because of the growing Sino-American rapprochement, which made the policy of containment against the Chinese no longer necessary. They also pointed out that a US base on Bangladesh soil would hardly be welcomed by its population, which had traditionally opposed military alliances.
in favour of non-alignment. Moreover, with Diego Garcia as American base, any base on the mainland would have been redundant.

Development of Military Relations

Contacts between senior military officials of the US and Bangladesh began with the visits of Lieutenant General Charles Wilson Bagral, Commander of the United States Army Western Command, to Bangladesh in January 1986 and by Admiral Ronald J. Hays, Commander-in-Chief of the US Pacific Command in December 1986. During their visit they met the President and high ranking military officials and discussed matters of mutual concern. A goodwill visit was paid by the US ship Capandamo to Chittagong Port in December 1986.36

But these visits once again gave rise to speculations about US once again seeking the naval base in St. Martin's Island, which was given impetus by the uncertainty about the renewal of the US bases in Phillipines. Some reactions of the Bangladesh press and politicians gave the impression that there was to be a military deal between the two countries. Bangladesh's ruling elite were of the opinion that the undivided Pakistan could become a member of SEATO and CENTO because of the geographical location of what was then East Pakistan.37

36 Delara Chaudhury, n.24, p.118.
37 Ibid.
In promoting military cooperation between Dhaka and Washington, a senior Bangladeshi military official, Principal Staff Officer to the President, Major General A. Latif, made a special trip to Washington in the summer of 1988 to explore the possibilities of Bangladesh's purchase of the US military supplies. He was well received but no significant progress could be made, which implied it had to intensify its efforts to make any headway into the matter.

Defense Supplies to Bangladesh

The US always denied military supplies to Bangladesh. Even way back in 1976, information was provided by Thomas Stern, an official of the State Department's Political and Military Affairs Division, to the Senate Arms Control and Security Arrangements Committee that –

"US does not desire an arms supply relationship with Bangladesh.... We would, however, be prepared to consider export license requests for cash sales on a commercial basis of limited type of military equipment such as transport and communication items."38

Consequently, Bangladesh could procure items for its defense. For the purpose, the US government also provided some modest grants. In 1983-84, Bangladesh received a remittance of $400,000 from the US Services Headquarters for buying these items.39

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38 Ibid.
39 Ibid.
However, continuous efforts by Bangladesh yielded some results. In February 1995, the US transferred twelve T-37B Primary Jet Trainers to Bangladesh under the US Excess Defense Articles Transfer Program. T-37B was twin seat trainer aircraft, a proven design, long used and was being used by the US Air Force to train jet pilots. However, this aircraft was not capable of carrying armaments. But this transfer was viewed as "the most significant transfer of military equipment". It is important to note here that it did not mean any dramatic transfer of technology or resources. It only characterized cooperation between the two countries, with the potentiality of expanding the scope and content. Thereafter, the two countries carried out joint exercises as a symbol of their collaboration. 'Operation Seabat', an exercise between the US Navy and Bangladesh Navy and Air Force was held in August 1995 in the Bay of Bengal. According to Commander Brian Prindle of the US Navy, this exercise focused on cooperation between US and Bangladesh naval forces in the fields of surveillance search and rescue operations during natural calamities, a legacy of the 1991 post-cyclonic disaster rescue 'Operation Sea Angel'. It also aimed at forging cooperation between the two Air Force in search and rescue techniques. Since 1992 these exercises are being held twice annually and sustaining and augmenting Bangladesh-US interactions.

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41 Ibid., p.244.
Currently following programs are continuing in the areas of mutual cooperation –

**International Military Education Training Program** – Bangladesh Armed Forces personnel receive professional training assistance from US through International Military Education Training Program (IMET) every year. This program is continuing since late 1970s. This ranges from training of cadets in the military academy to higher training in staff colleges and Army War College. Bangladesh also offers vacancies in staff college to US military officers, each year. Besides training, cooperation covers co-hosting conferences and seminars, for example, Pacific Area Senior Officers Logistic Seminars (PASOLS) and Pacific Armies Management Seminar (PAMS). Visits of high level military delegations and combined exercises are also held under the program.

**US-Bangladesh Joint Military Exercises** – As an affirmation to close understanding and cooperation, several joint military exercises and nation-building works have been taking place since 1988. These encompass exercises in various fields like medical, veterinary, special forces operation, public relation and humanitarian assistance. They are held under different

code names like, Baker Bullet, Baker Bandage, Badge Bundle, Code South, etc. 44

Relief Operation/Disaster Management – As mentioned earlier, the US and Bangladesh Armed Forces have carried out several joint relief and disaster management operations in the flood/natural calamity affected areas, especially since 1991 after 'Sea Angels'. These operations are still continuing.

Enhanced International Peacekeeping Capabilities Program - Bangladesh armed forces took part in 'Operation Desert Shield' with the US forces in the Gulf, which paved way for better understanding, trust and mutual confidence. As a result of good partnership, the US responded to Bangladesh proposal to assist in establishing a Peacekeeping Operation Training Centre (PKOTC) at Rajendrapur, Dhaka, which was a genuine need as reflected from the participation of Bangladesh in 26 United Nations Peacekeeping Missions since 1988. The PKOTC aims at providing services to other countries also in Asia Pacific region, with further US assistance. 45

Procurement of Equipment – Bangladesh Armed Forces are using different types of US equipment and currently procurement of four C-130B aircraft from the US Airforce is underway. 46

44 Ibid.
45 Ehsanul Haque, n.42, pp.243-44.
The American Peace Corps Program – The foundation for the resumption of this program was laid firmly in May 1997 when the visiting the US Peace Corps Country Director for Sri Lanka told newsmen that the corps would resume its program in Bangladesh. The Peace Corps Program, which was stopped in 1964 after operating in the erstwhile Pakistan for three years due to non-availability of funds, was resumed in May 1997.47

The two countries are signatories to a temporary treaty for conducting joint exercises; they have also signed a memorandum of understanding relating to the status of the US troops. Signing of Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the two countries took place in July 1998 and consequently 25 members of American Peace Corps arrived in Dhaka in November 1998 to train Primary School teachers on how to teach English language. In January 1999 they started their operation. Scope of the cooperation was further expanded by the signing of fresh MOU in March 1999 which now included mass education department also, besides the primary school teachers. The program received a boost with arrival of 35 more Peace Corps in February 2000.48

Last ten years have seen some positive developments which will go long way in furthering the cooperation between the two countries. The US troop platoons have visited Bangladesh on several occasions in the past to

47 Ibid.
conduct joint military exercises. There have been 26 such exercises involving the armies of the two countries in the last 10 years. Since 1982, a liaison team comprising the Pacific Command of the US and the Bangladesh military has been in operation to coordinate their actions in the Indian Ocean Zone, including in times of disasters, breach of peace and/or hostility in the region. More than 300 military personnel from Bangladesh have received training in the US since 1979. US military assistance to Bangladesh has been fairly steady since the 1980s. On 27 April 1997, when Dhaka ratified Chemicals and Biological Weapons Treaty, it was among 81 countries to have done so. The Treaty outlaws the production, stockpiling, transfer and use of chemical weapons worldwide.

A growth in relationship was reflected by the visit of Chief of US Armed Forces General Dennis Joe Reimol in April 1998 who headed a 97 member goodwill delegation. He met the Prime Minister, President and senior defense officials. The Foreign Ministry told during a press meeting in Dhaka that Bangladesh had no military agreement with any country in the world. However, preliminary negotiations were being made with the US to facilitate the holding of joint military exercises and for the participation of American army personnel in time of natural disaster. For the purpose the US suggested Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA).

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49 Ehsanul Haque, n.41., p.244.
The SOFA was proposed by the US diplomat, Mr. Bill Richardson during his visit to Bangladesh. The US had suggested that legal cover be created which would enable its troops to conduct joint exercises in Bangladesh and take part in rescue and relief operations during natural calamities. Commenting on the proposal, Haroon Habib wrote in *The Frontline*, that the reasons for the US interests in such an agreement in South Asia was no more a low priority region for the US administration in view of the nuclear tests by India and Pakistan which challenged the US economic interests. Military analysts also believed that in view of the withdrawal of the US forces from the Clark and Cubic Bay bases in the Philippines, Bangladesh could serve as "half-way-house" for the US forces in the region. However, there was also opinion among the intelligentsia, highlighted by the comment of Abdur Robb Khan, Research Director of BIJSS, that SOFA did not serve any US interest as far as making its presence in the region was concerned, but it provided security to the investments by the US companies in Bangladesh, which have grown from $20 million to $750 million in the period from 1996-2000. So, SOFA was in a way strategic treaty for the US to protect its economic interests.

The agreement over SOFA would have facilitated unhindered entry of the US troops into Bangladesh, in times of emergency, without having to

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51 Ibid.
52 Interviewed during my Dhaka visit in October 2000.
comply with even visa and passport formalities. Equipment and supply would also have been allowed to be brought in without being subject to customs formalities. The draft of the agreement was prevented to the Bangladesh government for consideration. But there were serious differences of opinion among sections of the media, intelligentsia, politicians and military personnel in Bangladesh over the SOFA agreement.

The foreign ministry also said, 'Bangladesh was engaged in military cooperation with several other countries, including India, Pakistan, Thailand, Britain, Australia and Singapore, which involves regular joint military exercises, but none of these nations had proposed such an agreement'.

Some of the Asian nations that have such agreements with the US are Japan, South Korea, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. Bangladeshi authorities explained that it was logical for these countries to enter into such agreements with the US as American troops are either already stationed there or because major American interests are involved there.

The authorities added that American troops could be allowed entry for relief operations, military exercises or on any other legitimate grounds under memorandum of understanding signed on a case by case basis as was the practice.

The proposed agreement also did not provide for any reciprocal facilities to Bangladesh defense personnel who could be sent to the US for training or for other purposes. Moreover, the Bangladesh government was not happy with the idea of granting unhindered entry to the US troops and
weapons supplies, as this would have required a constitutional amendment and such an agreement would have been politically risky.

Sections of the media, intelligentsia and left-leaning politicians argued that the proposed agreement's unequal provisions would work against Bangladesh's sovereignty and dignity. The "pro-liberation" group which supported the Awami League on most issues also came out against such an agreement as it would have compromised the country's sovereignty.

Among the political forces in Bangladesh that urged the government to sign the agreement included the so-called "anti-liberation group", which opposed the independence struggle in 1971 and which is an ally of religious fundamental forces. This group argued that Bangladesh needs a "security umbrella" of a major power to defend its interests in the now-nuclearized sub-continent. Strategic affairs experts who subscribe to this theory said that consequent to India's nuclear tests, it would be necessary for Bangladesh to enter into a military co-operation agreement with a major nuclear power "even if it meant that the islands in the Bay of Bengal would have to be made a base for that power." Several intellectuals likewise argued in favour of Bangladesh taking shelter under the security umbrella of a major power like the US "to counter any Indian design".

India also expressed "serious concerns" and "unhappiness" at the US government's attempts to force SOFA on Dhaka. India also conveyed to the US space department that any such move would be construed as "a threat impinging on India's security and its environs" because of its serious geo-
political implications.\textsuperscript{53} India also pointed out that "never before has such a development taken place" in the South Asian region even though Pakistan was once a member of SEATO and CENTO. The Americans then had access to Pakistani airbases and some other military facilities. But those were nothing compared to the sweeping provisions envisaged in the SOFA.

India conveyed its concerns to Bangladesh also. Despite the US clarification that SOFA was not conceived as a military pact and that it was not intended towards the establishment of a US military base in Bangladesh and the agreement would lay down the procedures for the movement of US personnel and supplies into the host nation for an exercise, besides clarifying the legal procedures to be followed, should the US military personnel harm individuals or property in the host nation during an exercise. And that SOFA was nothing but an umbrella agreement which would obviate the signing of MOUs with Dhaka every time the American Forces wanted to carry out joint military exercises in Bangladesh. But the Bangladesh government could not be convinced.

It was perceived by American officials that Bangladesh would be a loser for rejecting the accord because it was designed more to help countries during times of natural disasters and such other instances and not to use the country as a base for stationing troops and military development. The officials tried to allay the fears of Bangladesh regarding the base in

\textsuperscript{53} \textit{The Hindu}, 12 July 1998.
Bangladesh as the US already had a base in the Indian Ocean in Diego Garcia and had no need for another, particularly at a time when bases both at home and abroad were being closed and the defense budget was being slashed.

Washington saw the proposed agreement as a logical extension of the MOUs signed by the two countries to determine the status of the US forces during joint exercises. In 1998, the joint exercises focused on combating the narcotics mafia, organizing disaster relief, conducting air and sea rescue operations, building schools and providing medical training and treatment.

At one point, it seemed that the Sheikh Hasina government would unhesitatingly sign the agreement. But after mulling over the issue for months, the government expressed the view that Bangladesh has nothing to gain by signing SOFA in its present form: 'if anything, the agreement would be detrimental to the country's interests.' According to the country's foreign ministry, "Bangladesh has a responsibility towards the South Asian region and cannot allow entry of foreign troops which may have profound and far-reaching consequences.... SOFA has the potential to create unnecessary controversy with our friends and allies and might cause unwarranted bitterness." The stationing or frequent entry of foreign troops in the country might have an adverse impact both within and outside Bangladesh. "We don't see any reasonable ground or need to have an umbrella agreement like
Finally, the Bangladesh government in July 1998 rejected the US proposal to sign the controversial SOFA. Despite, its refusal to sign the agreement, both countries reaffirmed their commitment to work in the areas of mutual interests. This was confirmed by the PM of Bangladesh. On 2 August 1998, she said that "despite Dhaka's refusal to sign SOFA, bilateral relations with the US had remained excellent as before. In fact, it further improved.

The Signing of Humanitarian Assistance Need Assessment (HANA) was an indicator that SOFA did not alter the bilateral relationship. Experts are of the opinion that HANA is a diluted form of SOFA, but it addresses the concerns of Bangladesh which came to fore during the discussions over SOFA. According to the Prof. Abul Kalam of Dhaka University, HANA is a 'liberal and modified' form of SOFA. Under the program the US defense department was expected to complete a survey of the country's needs in times of calamities and disasters. In fact, by 25 August 1998 the US military team of experts on HANA identified 11 projects for enhancing the government's ability to respond to natural disasters.55

Recently, the US welcomed the signing of Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, which was ratified through an executive order signed by Prime

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54 Bangladesh Observer, 8 March 1998.
Minister Sheikh Hasina on 7 March 2000, saying it was an encouraging and positive signal for global nuclear disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation.56

Potential Areas of Future Cooperation

In the current scenario there is vast scope of expanding the existing cooperation. Few of them are identified below –

(i) Military Training – IMET program of US may be enhanced to cover more professionally rewarding course for Bangladesh Armed forces personnel under defense cooperation package. At the same time, Bangladesh can offer more vacancies for the US military personnel in different training establishments including vacancies in National Defence College (NDC) from the year 2002. Due to nuclearization of the sub-continent, Nuclear Biology and Chemical (NBC) warfare training, especially on protection and defense against NBC assumes greater importance. In this regard US military assistance in the form of training and equipment would be highly desirable. Bangladesh also intends to develop its PKOTC as a Regional Peacekeeping Training Academy with US assistance in future.

(ii) Joint Exercises and Nation-Building Works – Joint military exercises and nation-building works as joint ventures can be continued with a greater dimension and intensity. To improve capacities of its defense personnel Bangladesh would like them to witness large scale joint naval/air exercises in

56 BFPS, n.1, Vol.6, No.1, 2000, p.23
US as observers. Further, the US assistance can help Bangladesh in preparing itself for effective disaster management.

(iii) Procurement of Equipment – Bangladesh wishes to undertake projects to procure appropriate defense equipment from US on gratis/soft term loans. US can increase its supplies in view of nuclearization of the sub-continent.

(iv) Exchange of Visits – Exchange of goodwill visits by high level military delegations can help strengthen bilateral defense relations and further enable each other to identify new areas of plausible cooperation.