

Militarization - Is it a Threat to the National Security of Bangladesh?

Kaniz Subarna

Department of Peace and Conflict Studies, University of Dhaka

Bangladesh

E-mail: kanizsubarnaliza222@gmail.com

Abstract

Militarization defines as the method by which a state increases its military capacity to defend itself against any kind of violence and war. This note discusses the full and complete concept about militarization with today's Bangladesh. Militarization can be a threat or not to the national security of Bangladesh, this study shows and describes it well.

Keywords: Militarization; National Security; Threats Stemming; Threats Emanating; Security threats; Military expenditure.

1. Introduction

Since the onset of human life in this world, security has been the ultimate element for each and every human being to survive in this highly competitive world. But the notion of security was never static, it has continued to change with the passage of time. In this present world, most of the states hold quite realist outlook and state centrism chiefly dominates the current trend of the world politics. As such, protecting own self from the external threats or attacks and preserving own sovereignty is viewed as a must for each and every state to survive in this world full of anarchy and chaos. That's why almost all the states of the world lay much emphasize on establishing a strong and capable military. But sometimes over emphasis on military defense can prove to be precarious for the developing and underdeveloped states of the world. Other developmental projects of these states may be at risk due to the state leaders' overmuch preference for militarization. It is a matter of debate whether overmuch militarization is taking place in Bangladesh or not. This paper aims at analyzing the rate of military expenditure in Bangladesh in the last 25 years and finding out whether there is a trend of excessive militarization. And if so, then whether it is truly a threat to the national security of Bangladesh or not.

2. Concept of Militarization

External threats and attacks severely affect each and every citizen of the state and increases vulnerability. Therefore, a state has to have the capacity to defend itself and its' people from all kinds of insecurities and external invasions. From the traditional point of view, protecting the country men from external military threats is considered as one of the primary function of states. That's why, establishment of a strong military force has long been the major characteristic of defense activities for most of the states. In these states, military organization, consisting of specially trained people, is endowed with the responsibility to defend the state and its people from any kind of attacks coming from the rival countries. Considering military threats as a predominant one, states put much importance on developing the military force to ensure their national security. It is military way of thinking that chiefly dominates the present trend of international relations. Also, everyday life and culture in the modern states are influenced, to a great extent, by the militaristic mindset of the state leaders. ^[1]

The term '**militarization**' generally refers to the method by which a state increases its military capacity to defend itself against any kind of violence and war. It is the process through which the government enhances the capacity of the military force of the state "in quantitative terms (such as the percentage of GNP allotted to the maintenance and development of the military system) and in qualitative terms (such as the assertion of military values, the way of thinking in a society)". Militarization leads to the advancement of militarism in

society. Several positive changes in contemporary society as well as the international community have taken place since the Cold War, despite that, modern states still tend to conserve “numerically reduced and organizationally modified” armed forces. In fact, in most of the countries, modernized armed forces are seen to play much influential roles in the national policy and hence, they may be considered as an important part of the “social power of a nation”. [1] Militarization can be divided in three broader categories- Global Militarization, Regional Militarization and National Militarization. [2]

The concept of Militarization is closely related to military expenditure or military spending. When a government decides to increase military expenditure, it offers “wages and salaries” and compromise on other expenses for the armed forces and purchases more arms and ammunitions for them. Arms transfer is an important part of military expenditure. After the end of cold war, military expenditure decreased to a great extent, although this trend was not uniform in all the regions. However, several evidences show that in the recent years, the world is experiencing an increase in the military expenditure (**Dunne & Uye, No date**).

3. National Security of Bangladesh- in Light of the Security Threats

General concept of ‘National Security’ suggests that a nation and its people are to be secured from all kinds of insecurities, threats and attacks. There is no universal definition of national security, although several attempts have been made at different times to define this concept. During the Cold War, national security was defined as ‘the protection of the state and its vital interests from attack by other states’. However, after the termination of the Cold War, “threats to individual citizens and to way of life, as well as to the integrity and interests of the state” were also included in the definition of national security. [3]

It is imperative to assess national security of Bangladesh from both national and international perspective, as Bangladesh, since its emergence, has been facing a wide range of threats emanating from both national and international spheres. That’s why, national security of Bangladesh can better be understood through the discussion on the security threats, emanating from both domestic and external spheres. These threats are discussed in the following sections.

3.1. Threats Stemming from the domestic Spheres

Being a developing country of the world, the threats that Bangladesh faces mostly derive from its domestic arena. Political threats, economic threats, environmental threats, societal threats, insurgency – are but some of the internal threats to the national security of Bangladesh.

3.1.1. Political Threats

Governance, law and order and human rights are considered as the major elements of political security of any state. Therefore, government's implementation of good governance, the maintenance of law and order by law enforcement agencies and the capacity of state leaders to efficiently address human rights issues are very much necessary to ensure the national security of Bangladesh. ^[3] But to this date, the government of Bangladesh has failed to accomplish these provisions and strengthen national security due to political instability of the country. These political insecurities indeed create obstacles to the implementation of developmental initiatives that are necessary for strengthening national security of the country. Economic underdevelopment of the country and existence of undeveloped political institutions contribute to the political instabilities in Bangladesh. ^[4]

3.1.2. Economic Threats

Each and every state needs to ensure economic security for its people so that they may have a stable income or other resources to support a standard of living. Apart from ensuring stable income for people, economic security of a developing country like Bangladesh also depends on the level of employment. ^[3] But still now, Bangladesh has remained much underdeveloped in its economic sectors. The annual growth rate of the country is very much insufficient to cope with the increasing economic problems. Many people are still living below the poverty line. The poor economic condition of Bangladesh, coupled with a large population makes the country even more vulnerable to economic shocks. ^[4]

3.1.3. Societal Security

Gender inequality, violence against women and children, dowry system, child labor and drug abuse are some of the issues that severely disrupts social security and cast huge impact on the national security of Bangladesh. Although tremendous development in the field of women empowerment is seen in the recent years, yet physical and structural violence against women continues to take place in Bangladesh. Drug abuse is another important issue that severely affects national security of the country. Many of the neighboring countries are using her as "a destination country of drug smuggling" as well as a transit point "for drug trafficking to countries further afield". ^[3]

3.1.4. Environmental Security

National security of a country, to a large extent, depends on its environmental security. Environmental pollution may pose severe threats to the national security of a low-lying disaster-prone country like Bangladesh. Almost every year, natural calamities like tropical cyclones, storm surges, floods etc hits the

country and disrupts the normal life of the people. Also, Bangladesh is much vulnerable to Climate Change which greatly affects, biodiversity and ecosystems of the environment. [3]

3.1.5. Tribal Insurgency

Tribal insurgency is considered to be a massive threat to the national security of Bangladesh. The conflict between the government of Bangladesh and ‘national minorities’ originated right after the independence, when the Chakmas demanded for a “special status of the CHT”. Lack of political farsightedness of the national leaders to comprehend the gravity of this problem and the absence of a responsible democratic government has further worsened this situation. [4]

3.2. Threats Emanating from the External Sources

In most cases, external threats that a state faces derive from its neighboring countries. Due to its special geographical location, Bangladesh, is more likely to confront security threats from its “contiguous neighbors” like India and Myanmar. [6]

3.2.1. Water Issue

Being a riverine country, security of Bangladesh, to a large extent, depends on the security of its water resources. Over the years, Bangladesh has engaged in several political disputes with countries like India, Pakistan, and Nepal regarding the sharing of water which greatly affects economy of the region. [3]

3.2.2. International Terrorism

In the recent years, Bangladesh has been quite successful in checking terrorism. Yet, chances are that international terrorist organizations may use her as a “safe heaven”. Therefore, Bangladesh needs to be cautious in preventing any such efforts from taking place. [3]

3.2.3. Trafficking

Human trafficking poses severe threats to the national security of Bangladesh. Forcing women and children into prostitution and sex slavery is closely related with the issue of human trafficking and “illegal migration” which contributes to the spread of HIV and STDs in the region. [3]

3.2.4. Transnational Crime

Excessive Smuggling is occurring in the “porous borders” between India and Bangladesh and cattle, rice and all forms of consumer goods are being transferred unlawfully across the borders. But the most wicked form of smuggling is in arms and drugs Despite the negative economic impact of smuggling of consumer goods.

Several reports show that some organized criminal groups are smuggling phensidyl and yabaa across Myanmar, India and Bangladesh. [3]

4. Militarization and Military Expenditure in Bangladesh from 1991 to 2017 – A Growing Trend

Armed forces of Bangladesh have been the major performer of defensive activities since 1975 and have been in “position to channel resources to the defense sector”. [5] Although the government of Bangladesh has always allocated sufficient amount of budget for the defense sector and purchased sufficient arms and ammunition for the armed forces, the process of militarization took a fresh and new turn on the advent of the 90’s.

Between the year of 1991 to 2014, the Army raised up two new divisions and introduced a number of other specialized units apart from establishing new training institutions and cantonments. Modern arms and weapon systems including tanks, artillery guns, anti-tank missiles, anti-aircraft missiles and new communication equipment were added to the armed forces. [5]

In the proposed budget for FY 2009-10, the government announced that it aims at restructuring the country’s defense system for ensuring security of the country and of the people and continue to improve defense capability (**Global Security, no date**).



Figure: 1

In **Fig: 1** The military budget of 2014 was over Tk. 2,50,000 crore (over \$31 billion), of which Tk. 16,400 crore (\$ 2.05 billion) was allocated for defense sector. The amount represented 6.56% of the national budget and was 12.7% higher from the budget of 2013. ^[7]

In 2015, military Expenditure in Bangladesh increased to 2517.80 USD Million from 2374 USD Million in 2014. Military Expenditure in Bangladesh averaged 1343.87 USD Million from 1988 until 2015, reaching an all-time high of 2517.80 USD Million in 2015 and a record low of 640.60 USD Million in 1988 (**Trading Economics, no date**).

In June, the Government of Bangladesh announced that it increased the defense budget for 2016-2017 to \$2.8 billion U.S. – which is a 7% increase from 2015-2016. As of 2012 Bangladesh's annual defense budget was only \$1.6 billion. In February 2009, the newly elected government of Bangladesh announced an aspiring procurement plan, including anti-tank and anti-ship missile systems, aircraft for maritime patrol, frigates, tanks and helicopter. The government of Bangladesh is planning to further modernize the army, Navy and Air forces with the 'Forces Goal- 2030'. This project aims at equipping the armed forces with modern facilities and building their capacity to contribute in the protection of regional and international peace. With this view, during last 3 years, 390 training courses and 3600 training packages were conducted. Besides, joint training programs with India, Indonesia, Nepal and Turkey were organized. Foreign exchange equivalent amounting to Tk. 1,72,24,547 was deposited with the Government Treasury as proceed from foreign trainees (**Ministry of Finance, 2012**)

4.1. Analysis- A Threat to the National Security

From the details of military expenditure presented in the above section, it is quite evident that the share of national budget allocated for the defense sector has continued to increase in the last few years. Apart from increasing military expenditure, the government of Bangladesh is looking forward to implementing a military modernization plan, according to which, foreign partners of Bangladesh are expected to supply affordable defense systems, especially Special Operations Forces and disaster relief equipment. Also, this modernization effort may enable other countries to expand security cooperation, especially through the US Excess Defense Articles program (**Global Security, no date**).

In Bangladesh, more than 50 educational institutions from primary to university levels, are operated on a commercial basis by the national army. Armed Forces Medical College (AFMC), Military Institute of Science and Technology (MIST), Bangladesh University of Professionals (BUP) are few prominent institutions among them. These institutions are contributing, to a great extent, in the educational sector of Bangladesh, and providing better education to the students. Hundreds of military personnel are employed in

these institutions. ^[7] Military directed hospitals, like CMH, have proved to provide better medical treatment to the people. Thus, it can be seen that apart from the defense sector, armed forces of Bangladesh are gradually creating huge impact on the social, educational and health sector of the country.

But this increasing influence of armed forces rises two important questions- Is excessive militarization taking place in Bangladesh? If so, then is it really a threat to the national security of Bangladesh?

Giving precise answers to these questions is a bit tough in the present context. Because, it is an undeniable fact that a capable and strong military is a must for every state to preserve its sovereignty and its people. Armed Forces of Bangladesh relentlessly work to detect, deter and prevent any kind of threat to the country and play an immensely important role in land defense, air and space defense and maritime defense. Moreover, the Bangladesh military is greatly contributing to the U.N peacekeeping forces and has achieved recognition and gratitude for its contribution. Reports show that of all the contributing nations to the U.N peacekeeping force, Bangladesh is the largest which has deployed 10,394 troops to this date. ^[3] The external threats to the national security of Bangladesh discussed in the previous section shows that Bangladesh, due to its unique geo political position, is much likely to face external threats and attacks, mostly from its neighboring country. Therefore, to protect the sovereignty of the country, Bangladesh indeed needs to maintain a strong and modernized armed force. Apart from playing defensive roles armed forces also contributes in preserving national security by assisting civilian authorities in saving lives, protecting property, enhancing public health and safety and lessening the threat of a catastrophe. ^[3] That's why, it can't be denied that Bangladesh actually needs militarization, and the measures adopted recently to modernize military is indeed needed.

But, is not to forget that Bangladesh is still a developing nation. It has remained weak and underdeveloped mostly in the nontraditional security aspects and the domestic threats to the national security of Bangladesh explained in the previous segments testify it. Now and then, different natural calamities hit the country, that render it even more vulnerable to economic shocks Therefore, being a developing country, the government ought to put much importance in ensuring nontraditional securities of the country, like- economic security, food security, health security, educational security etc. and not only focusing the defense sector. But, from **the report of Ministry of Finance**, it is seen that in 2016-17, 8.4% of the non-development budget was allocated for the defense sector, whereas 6.1 % of the total budget was allocated for social security and welfare sector. Agricultural and health sector contained 2.5% and 4.2% of the total non-developmental budget respectively. In 2015-16, 6.2% of the economic resources was distributed to the defense sector, on the other hand, only 4.3% of the resources was allocated for the health sector. These data show that in the recent years, the government is laying much emphasize in the military sector and allocating smaller amount of

budget for other sectors. This is a worrying situation for Bangladesh, if not threatening. Overt emphasis on defense sector may render other sectors underdeveloped. If the government focus on developing the military forces only and continues to allocate smaller share of the national budget for the other developmental sectors like health sector, agricultural sector, social security sector etc. then soon these sectors will become structurally weak due to lack of sufficient amount of financial support. As such, the government will have to suffer in the long run. Therefore, it is a must for the government to maintain a balance between militarization and strengthening nontraditional securities of the country.

5. Conclusion

For the sake of strengthening the defense system, militarization is a must for each and every state. But developing state like Bangladesh cannot go for militarization putting other developmental sectors at risk. The trend of militarization prevailing in Bangladesh in the recent years is not really threatening, but it has the chance to weaken other developmental sectors in the coming years. Therefore, the government of Bangladesh ought to formulate its policies keeping these very factors in mind.

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Author

Kaniz Subarna is a student of BA honors in the University of Dhaka. She is studying 4th year in the Department of Peace & Conflict Studies. She already attended many national and international conferences. Her main interest is in the study of peace & conflict studies, women and gender studies, human development, social sciences and psychology. She wrote many national journals in Bangladesh. She awarded youth writing prize from many competitions.