

Civil-Military Relations in Bangladesh: From Dominant Military Control to Dominant Civilian Control

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This article attempts to study the civil-military relations (CMR) in Bangladesh with particular focus on the role of military in nation-security issues. The paper traces the trajectory of civil-military relations in Bangladesh since independence. This has been followed up with an analysis of the factors affecting civil-military relations in Bangladesh, namely, political institutionalisation, military institutionalisation, domestic socio-economic milieu, and the international environment. The next section studies the military's role in national security decision-making in Bangladesh and how the role of the military has shifted away from the military to dominance of civilian, political leadership over national security decision-making in Bangladesh. Finally, the article analyses the membership of the apex national security decision making bodies in National Committee for Intelligence Co-ordination (NCIC) and National Security Council (NSC), which further supports the argument of how the civilian has institutionally attempted to control major foreign policy and security related decision making, but the military in Bangladesh remains an important player which wields informal influence over national security decision making in Bangladesh.

Keywords: Civil-Military Relations, Civilian control over Military, Bangladesh military, National Security Decision Making, National Security Council, National Committee for Intelligence Coordination.

South Asia is an interesting case for any scholar studying civil-military relations, given the differing nature of civil military relations in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh all of which were carved out of British India post 1947. India, Pakistan and Bangladesh were part of the British Empire and share a common history, military traditions and social culture; however, they took different directions when it came to the nature and trajectory of civil military relations in these countries.

Pakistan which was created after partition of British India has been at one end of the spectrum in terms of civil military relations with the military (especially the Pakistan Army) being all powerful and having influence over major foreign policy and national security issues. The Army has major economic stakes with the military almost being a business conglomerate being involved in various successful economic activities. Professor Ayesha Siddiqi in her book *Military Inc.* has argued that the three main foundations run by the military the Fauji foundation (Army), the Shaheen foundation (Air Force) and Bahria foundation (Pakistan Navy) “control more than 100 separate commercial entities ... producing everything from cement to cereals” (Siddiqi, 2007, p. 22).

Civil-military relations in India lie at the other end of the spectrum with civilian control over the military since India's independence. On the other hand, Bangladesh has been a mixed bag in terms of civil-military relations with periods of civilian domination interspersed with military domination of the relationship. The military for instance was securely in control during General Ziaur Rahman's and General Ershad's rule when the Bangladesh military has assumed control over the government.

There is a dearth of literature about civil-military relations in Bangladesh, particularly the military's role in national security issues in the country. This paper tries to address this gap and has attempted to analyse the nature of civil-military relations and study the major factors affecting civil-military relations in Bangladesh. In addition, it examines the military's role in national security issues.

The article is organised into four major sections. The first section provides a brief overview of the literature on the concept of civil-military relations since Huntington's seminal work, *The Soldier and the State*. The second section is a historical overview of Bangladesh's civil-military relations. This is followed by the third section which discusses the various factors affecting or shaping civil-military relations in the country. The final section of the article seeks to understand the Bangladesh military's role and influence in decision-making on national security issues by examining the military's role in national security decision-making bodies like the National Committee for Intelligence Co-ordination (NCIC) and National Security Council (NSC).

Brief Analysis of Literature on Civil Military Relations

The Civil-military relations (CMR), defined as a relationship between the civilian and the military is important for the endurance of the state against internal and external enemies. The next few paragraphs will provide an overview of the academic literature on civil military relations since Samuel P. Huntington's wrote his seminal book *The Soldier and the State* which was instrumental in laying down an organised theoretical framework in the field of Civil Military Relations. In his book, Huntington challenges many of the old assumptions and ideas about military roles in society. Huntington's main thesis revolves around his concept of "objective and subjective civilian control" (Huntington, 1981, pp. 80–84).

Objective control is important to ensure maximisation of military subordination to civilian control while ensuring that the military retains its fighting power and capability. It also guarantees the protection of civilian society from the military and also from external enemies. Huntington argues that while the military could be autonomous in its sphere, it needs to be politically neutral and voluntarily subordinate to civilian control. While the military could be responsible for operational and tactical decisions, the civilian leadership is needed to decide matters of policy and grand strategy.

Subjective civilian control is a way of minimising military power by maximising civilian influence. This, however, runs the risk of diluting the cohesion and professionalism of the armed forces. Huntington states that:

"The simplest way of minimising military power would appear to be the maximising of the power of civilian groups in relation to the military ... consequently the maximising of civilian power always means the maximising of the power of some particular civilian group or groups" (Huntington, 1981, p. 80).

After the shot across the bow by Huntington, there were many other scholars who contributed to the field of civil military relations. Samuel E. Finer in his book, *The Man on Horseback: The Role of the Military in Politics* (1962) argued that Huntington's approach "emphasised that professionalism would presuppose that the military should intervene as little as possible in the political sphere." Samuel Finer, stated that it is important to ensure "that a government can be efficient enough to keep the civil-military relationship in check, and ensuring that the need for intervention by the armed forces in society would be minimal" (Finer, 2017, p. 24). Morris Janowitz in his book, *The Professional Soldier: A Social and Political Portrait*, has argued that, "the military establishment becomes a constabulary force when it is continuously prepared to act, committed to the minimum use of force, and seeks variable international relations, rather than victory" (Janowitz, 1960, p. 418). He points out that, "the civilian leadership has three main mechanisms for controlling the military, namely the budget process; the allocation of missions and responsibilities; and advice to the President concerning the use of the military to advance US interest in the international realm" (Janowitz, 1960, pp. 363–365).

Following the initial work by Huntington and Janowitz, many other scholars used the framework and debates they had started in the field of civil military relations to study non-western and post-colonial societies. Some among them are Peter D. Feaver (Feaver, 2003, p. 55) who used the "Principal Agent" framework to study civil-military relations. Another scholar is Rebecca L. Schiff (Schiff, 1996, pp. 277–283) who employs the "Concordance Theory" to study the relations between the political elite, military and citizenry. In order to create a "distributional approach", Risa A. Brooks maintained the civil-military distinction modifying the aspects of existing theories. This helps us to understand "how various patterns of civil-military relations influence on strategic assessment" (Brooks, 2018).

Civil Military Relations in Bangladesh: A Historical Overview

After a long struggle, Bangladesh emerged as a sovereign state on 16 December 1971. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was a leading figure of the Bangladesh's struggle for independence and also the Awami League which was founded in 1949 as an East Pakistan based political party. After becoming independent in December 1971, Bangladesh adopted its constitution in December 1972 which put in place a parliamentary system of government (Jacobs, 2012). The rise of the independence movement in East Pakistan was based on Bengali nationalism and self-determination mixed with a sense of discrimination of the Bengali-dominated East Pakistan by the Punjabi-dominated West Pakistan political leadership. This sense of discrimination resulted in the liberation war which culminated in the independence of Bangladesh. During Bangladesh's freedom struggle, Bengali military authorities assumed responsibility for setting up the Mukti Bahini at different areas both inside and outside Bangladesh and took the lead in combatting the excess of the Pakistan Army (E. Ahmed, 2004, p. 7).

Following the creation of Bangladesh, the military did not immediately emerge as a major actor which resulted in the Awami League and its leaders, who were instrumental in the country's freedom struggle, being in control of the Bangladeshi polity. However, as outlined in the following paragraphs, Bangladesh experienced

military rule between 1975 and 1990. In the context of civil-military relations in Bangladesh, while the military went back to barracks in 1990, its subordination to political control remains vague against the backdrop of a lack of institutionalisation (Hasanuzzaman, 2016).

In Bangladesh, there were two major coups in 1975 and 1982 with the military in power for 15 years out of 49 years since the country's independence. However, since the 1991 general polls, parliamentary democracy has been restored in Bangladesh with the civilian leadership re-asserting their control over the military and the national security apparatus, coming back in the grasp of the civilian leadership. It is evident that, in past there have been periods when the military has assumed control over the government. The inability of the political leaders to promote national stability has shifted political initiative to the armed forces and led to the military assuming a position of power.

Bangladeshi leaders supported a parliamentary based political system with genuine power vested in the cabinet, collectively responsible to the legislature which was in charge of law-making. In the Bangladesh liberation war, the role of the armed forces made the political leaders concerned regarding the subsequent role of the military and the political leadership therefore reorganised the armed forces (Hasanuzzaman, 2016, pp. 110–111). As the Mukti Bahini had played an important role in the Bangladeshi independence, there was growth in the popularity of the military institutions among the public at large and as a result they were seen as an alternative to the newly formed government led by Mujibur Rahman. Siegfried Wolf has described this situation as “polarising the country for or against Mujibur” (Wolf, 2013, p. 16). To remedy this situation, on March 7, 1972, the Bangladeshi government passed a presidential order which brought the Jatiyo Rokhi Bahini (JRB) under the Prime Minister. Additionally, this also integrated the JRB into the armed forces and called them upon to perform their duties as directed by the government. This was an important step by the civilian administration to exercise their control over the military (M. U. R. Choudhury, 2022, p. 306). Also, in April 1972, the Bangladeshi government established separate Service Headquarters for all the three arms of the military. As a result they moved away from the earlier structure of a Commander in Chief (C-in-C) with the Army, Navy and Air Force getting separate Chiefs of Staff (M. U. R. Choudhury, 2022, p. 304).

On 15 August 1975, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, his relatives, and associates were killed in an action which was led by mid-ranking officers who did not have their superior officers' endorsement or approval which led to many describing it as a “leaderless coup” (Codron, 2007, para. 39). After Sheikh Mujib's assassination, the Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JASOD) which was a leftist political party along with the sections of the military carried out several acts of violence across Bangladesh. In order to provide some order and stability to the country, Major General Ziaur Rahman, who was himself a charismatic and popular figure from the Liberation War (along with three other commanders) took control of Bangladesh polity and imposed Martial Law on November 29, 1976 (M. U. R. Choudhury, 2022, p. 307). From 1975 to the end of 1990 the military emerged as a significant political force under two military rulers, General Ziaur Rahman and General H. M. Ershad. The generals initially exercised state power directly and later indirectly through a well-designed strategy of militarising the polity and instituting a democratic facade by a process of civilianisation (Hasanuzzaman, 2016). The following paragraphs deliberate on how

the period of military rule shifted the balance of civil-military relations in the country.

In August 1975, the political situation following the military take over resulted in the military's rise as major decision-makers in Bangladeshi polity. Ziaur Rahman who ruled between 1975 and 1981 helped the military to achieve an important role depending solely on military power. General Ziaur Rahman left an impression on the Bangladeshi polity and civil-military relations in the country as he was able to reduce the differences between the 'freedom fighters' from the Mukti Bahini and the 'repatriates' who were from the erstwhile East Pakistan military. As he was successful in reducing the difference, it resulted in enhancing the professionalism of the Bangladeshi military as well as in increasing his ability to provide a stable rule to the country (Wolf, 2013, p. 16).

In contrast to Sheikh Mujibur Rahman who had strived to separate the polity from the military, General Ziaur Rahman pursued a strategy of consolidating the military's position in several areas of national life with increasing military representation in civilian administration. Prior to the presidential elections in June 1978, General Zia stepped down as Chief of Army Staff, when he took over as President and introduced a multi-party framework in the nation. Subsequently, the military became the dominant actor in Bangladeshi polity with Ziaur Rahman as the President who also held the position of the Defence Minister and Supreme Commander of the armed forces. The Commander-in-Chief's Secretariat was also established during Ziaur Rahman's administration which further consolidated the military's hold over Bangladeshi polity. Mahmud Ur Rahman Choudhury has written that the Secretariat which was headed by a Principal Staff Officer of Major General or Lt. General rank "took all important organisational, operational and administrative decisions regarding the three Services" with the Ministry of Defence largely reduced to clerical responsibilities (M. U. R. Choudhury, 2022, p. 308).

During the 1980s the military remained an important force in Bangladeshi society and managed to acquire a lot of financial, social, and political power (E. Ahmed, 2004, pp. 110–111). Then, in February 1979, Zia held elections and moved ahead with the Martial Law Administration's dismantlement. However, in May 1981 after Zia was assassinated in Chittagong, Vice-President Justice Abdul Sattar was sworn in as acting President and subsequently declared national emergency. On 24 March 1982, the Bangladesh Army stepped in once again with Army Chief Lieutenant General Hussain Muhammad Ershad taking power in a bloodless coup, "suspending the constitution and political parties" (Cohen, 2010, p. 360). The dominance of military continued during the reign of General Ershad, with military officers occupying important civilian positions. In November 1986, General Ershad renamed the Secretariat of the Commander in Chief to Supreme Command Headquarters without any attendant changes in the responsibilities or power of the office (M. U. R. Choudhury, 2022, p. 308; Wolf, 2013, p. 17).

In May 1986, despite a boycott by the BNP, parliamentary elections were held and Ershad's Jatiya party won a majority. The Awami League participated in the elections. Following that, Ershad sought to consolidate the military's position in the country by mooting a bill to include military representation in local administrative councils. However, this proved to be a lightning rod for the opposition and resulted in the hasty end of the Ershad regime. BNP led by Begum Khaleda Zia and Awami League led by Sheikh Hasina continued to try to force out Ershad from power. Both political leaders attempted to take the lead in the political resistance thereby seeking

to emerge as the legitimate successor to take over reins from General Ershad.

By 1990, the Bangladeshi Army had begun to conclude that the Army as an institution was more important than any individual or political gathering with some sections of the military of being of the view that by engaging in politics through his Jatiya Party, Ershad was possibly degrading the military's position in the country (Maniruzzaman, 1992, pp. 206–207).

By December 1990, the political circumstances changed drastically with national protests leading to General Ershad offering his resignation and stepping down. On 27 February 1991, this was followed by the establishment of a caretaker, the government headed by Chief Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed, which carried out a free and fair election that resulted in a genuinely representative Jatiya Sangsad. In an effort to democratise the nation, the Sangsad significantly amended the constitution. In the 1991 general polls, parliamentary democracy was restored in Bangladesh based on political consensus through the twelfth constitutional amendment initiating a new phase in civil-military relations. Democratic rule continued between 1991–2006 led by Begum Khalida Zia of Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), Sheikh Hasina of the Awami League, and again Khaleda Zia maintained balanced working relations with the military while trying to bring the Army under political control (Hasanuzzaman, 2016, p. 112).

During this phase, the civilian leadership in Bangladesh, slowly but steadily reasserted their dominance and wrested control back from the military. As part of this reorganisation, the Supreme Headquarter established by Ziaur Rahman was again rechristened as the Armed Forces Division (AFD). Importantly however, it was placed under civilian control with the AFD reporting to the Prime Minister's Office. Also, the Prime Minister held the additional portfolio of Minister of Defence further cementing civilian control over the military as the Prime Minister became the supreme commander of the military forces with the President only presiding over ceremonial functions (M. U. R. Choudhury, 2022, p. 311; Wolf, 2013, p. 19).

Budgetary control was another mechanism that the civilian leadership used to exercise their control over the military. During this phase, the military put up annual budgetary proposal to the civilian leadership for necessary approvals especially for purchases of defence equipment and larger platforms (M. U. R. Choudhury, 2022, p. 311; Wolf, 2013, p. 18). Reassertion of control over the intelligence organisation like the Directorate General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI) was key for civilian control and supremacy over the military. As the Prime Minister also held the position of the Defence Minister, s/he was able to use the DGFI to monitor the activities of the military which was key for civilian control of the civil-military relationship (Wolf, 2013, p. 19).

Beginning March 1994, the political situation in Bangladesh again took a turn for the worse, with mass nationwide protests and strikes being led by Awami League. This led to a caretaker government carrying out the national elections in June 1996 which were won by Awami League and Sheikh Hasina became the Prime Minister, forming a "Government of National Consensus" in June 1996. Sheikh Hasina ruled from 1996 to 2001 until the BNP under Khaleda Zia returned to power. However, in August 2004, a major grenade attack was carried out allegedly masterminded by Tarique Rahman the son of Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and the then Home Minister Lutfuzzaman Babar on a rally where Sheikh Hasina and many other opposition leaders

attended. Twenty-four people including Ivy Rehman a prominent leader of the Awami League were killed.

The enmity between the two major parties - Bangladesh Nationalist Party and Awami League - and their immense disagreement on the formation of caretaker governments to oversee the scheduled ninth general polls became more pronounced as the polls neared. The disagreements and the consequent spate of violence in the country resulted in the military again reasserting itself and staging a 'soft coup' on 11 January 2007. In the Bangladeshi press and political discourse, it is often referred to as 1/11 as the emergency was declared on the evening of 11 January 2007 and the caretaker government was appointed the next day with the support of the military. An Army-backed caretaker government headed by a former Governor of the Bangladesh Bank, Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed, acting as the marionette of the military was put in place for the next two years (Hasanuzzaman, 2016, p. 113).

In 2008, Bangladesh returned to democracy following the ninth parliamentary elections held in December 2008. The massive victory secured by the Awami League Party, the defeat of the BNP and Jamaat-led Islamic nationalist alliance and winning 229 out of 300 seats in the Parliament by the Awami League, signified a fresh start at re-building democracy and institutionalising civilian control over all state institutions/apparatuses, including the armed forces. The country got another opportunity to strengthen its democracy and maintain the primacy of civilian control over the military (Hasanuzzaman, 2016, p. 114).

Research Methodology

After chronicling the ups and downs of civil-military relations in Bangladesh, the following section of the paper will delve into the research methodology and the framework that the article has used to analyse the major factors that affect civil-military relations in Bangladesh. The authors have used - with some modifications - the analytical framework (See the Table 1) put forth by Prof. Veena Kukreja in her book, *Civil-Military Relations in South Asia* (Kukreja, 1991). Professor Kukreja in her book has outlined the factors affecting civil-military relations. The first broad factor is 'political institutionalisation' which studies how political institutionalisation affects civil-military relations in Bangladesh. The various factors under this broad category are role of political parties and leadership, legitimacy of political parties, functioning democratic institutions and free and fair elections. These parameters analyse how the civilian and military institutions work in Bangladesh's political system.

The second broad factor is 'military institutionalisation' which studies the size, defence expenditure and budget, professionalism of the military, regional representation in recruitment and military's role in aiding civilian authority. These parameters look into the how the civil and political institutions take decisions about the military establishment and the degree of military integration with civilian power structures.

The third factor is 'domestic and socio-economic' which discusses the impact of colonial legacy, role of religion, ethnic factors, caste and class factors and internal disruption. This category studies how these various domestic and socio-economic factors affect civil-military relations in Bangladesh. The fourth and last factor put forth by Prof Kukreja is 'international environment' which encompasses external influences, war with external powers and the external economic dependencies. The

major factors in each of these categories as described by Prof Veena Kukreja have been outlined in the Table 1 below. The model has been used by the authors to analyse the various factors shaping civil military relations in Bangladesh.

TABLE 1: Major Factor Affecting Civil Military Relations in Bangladesh

Political Institutionalisation	Military Institutionalisation	The Domestic Socio-economic	International Environment
Role of Political Parties and Leadership	Size of Military	Role of Religion	External Influence
Legitimacy of Political Parties	Defence Budget and Resources	Ethnic or Cultural Pluralism	
Functioning of Democratic Institutions	Regional representation in Recruitment	Internal Disruption	External Economic dependencies
Free and Fair Elections	Professionalism Military in Aiding Civil Authorities		

Source: Prepared by the authors after modifying the framework put forth by Prof. Veena Kukreja in her book *Civil Military Relations in South Asia*

Another analytical framework used in this paper is to study the role of military in National Security Decision-making in Bangladesh. The authors have used - with modifications - the analytical framework (see Table 2) put forth by Phillip C. Saunders and Andrew Scobell in their book, *PLA Influence on China's National Security Policymaking* (Saunders & Scobell, 2015, pp. 1–32). The book has outlined the role of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) in national security policymaking. The first outlines the nature of issues which PLA's role in participating and advising in decision-making. Second, discusses on the PLA's influence on the different stages in the policy process.

The authors have broadly studied the nature of issues related to the military's role in various issues ranging from National Security Strategy, Defence Policy and in Intelligence Agencies. Secondly, the military's role in various national security related decision-making bodies is analysed. In Bangladesh, the bodies that are studied are National Committee for Intelligence Co-ordination and the National Security Council.

TABLE 2: Military's role in National Security Decision-making

Nature of Issues	Decision-making Bodies
National Security Strategy	National Committee for Intelligence Co-ordination
Defence Policy	National Security Council
Intelligence Agencies	

Major Factors Affecting Civil-military Relations in Bangladesh

The Bangladeshi polity is divided between the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and the Awami League as the society also is deeply divided along political lines. Mohamad Karim (Karim, 2019) has argued that such a culture has an impact on governance, professionalism, and institution-building in Bangladesh. Though the military does not interfere in the professional domain, it is not left untouched by the changes and the ups and downs witnessed by the Bangladesh polity. As mentioned in the research methodology section, the next section of the article will study the various factors affecting civil-military relations (CMR) in Bangladesh using the framework put forth by Prof Veena Kukreja in her book *Civil Military Relations in South Asia*. The various factors are Political Institutionalisation, Military Institutionalisation, Domestic Socio-economic milieu, and the International Environment.

Political Institutionalisation

Political Institutionalisation is impacted by different factors such as mass political leadership and political parties, legitimacy of political parties, functioning democratic institution and free and fair elections in Bangladesh. Theoretically, the model identifies two significant factors; “responsiveness and character” as important to our understanding of the basis of the legitimacy of political leaders in Bangladesh (Andaleeb & Irwin, 2004, p. 84).

In Bangladesh, the project of putting in place a democratic governance system suffered a jolt immediately after its independence as a result of the tragic assassination of the charismatic *Banglabandu*, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman along with most members of his family by some army officers (Mascarenhas, 1986, p. 16). Though Bangladesh started out with the Westminster model of democracy, it took very little time to transform Bangladesh into a single party rule. During the period 1975 to 1990, the country was largely under military control (Mascarenhas, 1986, p. 181). As noted in the above paragraphs, time and again, the military has been given the space to enter into the political, governmental sphere due to a political vacuum or widespread violence and instability in the country. The allegations of corruption against the political leaders as well as the government’s failure to deliver good governance led to a perception that the military was the only organisation which could “protect the idea of democracy” (Wolf, 2013, p. 24). This happened after the assassination of Sheikh Mujib when General Ziaur Rahman took over and a similar situation was witnessed during the Caretaker government when the military was calling the shots from behind the scenes.

The Thirteenth Amendment of the Bangladeshi Constitution created a peculiar situation in the country. In order to ensure free and fair elections, the constitution mandates the duly elected government to hand over charge to a ‘caretaker’ regime to support the Election Commission to conduct free and fair elections within a period of three months. However, this situation led to a political and administrative vacuum which provides the military with an important role in the Bangladeshi polity. As the military is able to support the caretaker government in its administrative and security related matters, it emerges as an important player, which can best be described as ‘rule from the barracks.’ Such a situation weakens the political parties and the institutionalisation of civilian control as it provides the military the space to assert and cement their dominance during this period (Wolf, 2013, p. 25).

Bangladesh returned to democracy following the ninth parliamentary elections held in December 2008. It signified a fresh start of building democracy and institutionalising civilian control over all state institutions including the armed forces. Since 2008, Bangladesh has witnessed regular elections and peaceful transfer of power. This has provided the political leadership and political parties the space to exercise control over the military in important foreign policy and national security decisions. Bangladeshi political leadership has historically suffered in the past from a lack of political legitimacy due to allegations of corruption, political infighting - between and within - political parties which in turn resulted in political instability and provided space to the military to intervene. The continued success in delivering good governance and economic growth by the Awami League government under Sheikh Hasina has contributed to her popularity in the public and has added to the credibility of the overall political leadership in Bangladesh.

Military Institutionalisation

The military forces of Bangladesh constitute 0.1 percent of the country's 2022 population of 164,098,818 (*Bangladesh Military Strength 2020*, 2020). In 1975, there were approximately 36,000 men in the military service in Bangladesh of which 30,000 were in the Army, 5,500 in the Air Force, and 500 in the Navy (International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1977). Despite comprising of over half of the population (56 per cent) in 1971, Bengalis made up less than 10 percent of an army estimated at 350,000. The fact that East Pakistan population was largely sidelined in the military before the creation of Bangladesh can be seen from the fact that only two out of the top fifty officers in post-Independence Pakistan were Bengalis (Lindquist, 1977, p. 11). During the Ershad period, the armed forces' strength increased from 60,000 in 1975-76 to 101,500 in 1988-89 (S. I. Ahmed, 2006, p. 287). In 1990, the active military personnel were 103,000 of which 90,000 were in the Army, 7,500 were in the Navy and 6,000 were Air force (International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1990). In 2022, the active military personnel was 1,63,050 of which 1,32,150 in the Army, 16,900 in the Navy, and 14,000 in the Air Force (International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2022, p. 250).

The *Military Balance* published by the International Institute for Strategic Studies, London describes the Bangladesh military in the following words. It states, "Bangladesh has a limited military capability optimised for border and internal security tasks, and its forces have shown themselves capable of mobilising and deploying quickly to tackle internal security tasks" (International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2018). The Bangladesh military has time and again played an important role in disaster relief during monsoon floods which afflict the country from time to time. Such actions by the military have continued to strengthen the perception that the military remains one of the key institutions in Bangladesh.

Despite regular elections and political stability in the past few decades in Bangladesh, the civilian leadership is still reliant on the military for some key matters like formulation of defence policy and procurement issues due to the lack of such expertise in the civilian sector. Siegfried Wolf has argued that while the military has attempted to remain neutral and not take a position in the political rivalry between the Awami League and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party, in recent years, given civilian dominance and politicisation of the military, the military has largely been siding with the party in power to secure its position and interests (Wolf, 2013). Also, given

the military's role in training and supporting the police and paramilitary forces like the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) and the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) / Border Guards Bangladesh (BGB) the military has been able to develop institutional linkages within the Home and Defence Ministry and the Armed Forces Division (AFD). In addition, the military has been able to hold on to key civilian posts in bureaucracy, foreign missions which it began occupying during General Ziaur Rahman and General Ershad's tenure. In recent times, the military has expanded its interest into business corporations (S. I. Ahmed, 2006, p. 287), commercial interests including real estate, banks and other businesses (International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2022, p. 250).

Isfaq Illahi Choudhury, writing in *The Daily Star*, has pointed to efforts by the military to bridge the gap between the civilians and the armed forces. Traditionally, military institutions like the Military Institute of Science and Technology (MIST) and Armed Forces Medical College (AFMC) have been closed to the civilian population. However, in recent years, this has changed with induction of civilians into these military run premier educational institutions. Recent years has also witnessed regular training of civilian officers at the National Defence College (NDC) and the military officers attending the government run Public Administration Training Centre (PATC). Such efforts will definitely go a long way in reducing the acrimony in the relationship between the civilian and military institutions (I. I. Choudhury, 2010).

Domestic Socio-Economic Milieu

In Bangladesh during the initial years, religion did not play a very important role in the shaping of the state's civil-military relations, owing to Bangladesh's emergence as a secular democracy. However, this changed with the rise of Islamist forces. Under President Ershad, Bangladesh passed the eighth constitutional amendment on June 9, 1988, and Islam was declared as the state religion. 2011 Article 2A was amended to read that, "the State religion of the Republic is Islam, but the State shall ensure equal status and equal right in the practice of the Hindu, Buddhist, Christian and other religions" (*The Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh*, n.d.). Bangladesh's recognition of Islam as a state religion ignited the people's religious sentiments and rejuvenated radical religious groups in the country. By making Islam the state religion, the military also sought to imbibe a religious identity that could devolve into a hyper-national identity which could perhaps be an effective way to break the religious neutrality of the state.

In Bangladesh, ninety eight percent of the population are Bengalis and remaining two percent of population were from Bihar region of India and other ethnic minorities. In northern Bangladesh minorities are counted among the indigenous people and the Chittagong Hill region has almost eleven ethnic minorities groups like Tanchangya, Chakma, Kuki, Bawn and Marma. The north Bengal region has large population of Santals while the Mymensingh region is home to a large Garo population (*World Population Review*, 2022). People speaking Arabic, Persian, and Turkic languages also have contributed to the ethnic characteristics of the region thereby contributing to the overall cultural diversity of the country. In Bangladesh, in addition to the large number of Muslim officers in the Army, Chakma and the Marma communities are also well represented in the Army (*Bangladesh Military Personnel*, n.d.).

The major internal security challenge faced by Bangladesh is drug trafficking,

insurgency and terrorism. Insurgency in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), and the endemic political-economic crisis, are the two most serious internal security challenges faced by Bangladesh. However, the Chakma insurgency is confined only to the CHT area.

In South Asia, Bangladesh is one of the fastest-growing economies. Bangladesh's GDP has grown at an average of 6.44 percent in between 2011 to 2021, despite the slowdown in 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic (World Bank, n.d.). According to an analyst in Bangladesh, the trade gap with China will continue to grow and dependence on China will also increase, generally for the import of raw material. With overall economic progress, Bangladesh's dependence on aid has reduced resulting in the improvement in the general population's economic conditions.

Bangladesh Army has a strong history of assuming key functions in the nation's socio-political and economic issues. The Army has now emerged as a major player in civil authority and business arena, with an interest spread across all the economy's major sectors (S. Islam, 2016). Certain big structural development projects like the construction of buildings, roads, and bridges have been secured through military involvement. To reduce corruption and ensure measured security, the government has decided to involve the Army in big development projects. Currently, the ongoing "Padma Bridge Project" is being monitored and controlled by the Army. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina herself has directly asked the Bangladesh Army to cooperate in constructing the Padma Bridge (Md. S. Islam, 2022).

International Environment

India's predominant position and policy towards the neighbourhood creates a unique structural incentive and pressure for Bangladesh's foreign policy decision making. India and China are engaged in a geopolitical competition to expand their regional footprint and influence in Bangladesh. The key challenge for Bangladesh is therefore to be able to maintain a delicate balance in its relations with China and India without antagonising either of the two major Asian powers (Ashraf & Rana, 2017, pp. 21–25). The United States, European Union (EU), Russia, and Japan despite the economic and political power in the global system, currently do not have much interest or influence in Bangladesh. In essence, India and China's competition in South Asia is an important factor in Bangladesh's foreign policy and security decision-making.

India and Bangladesh bilateral relations have been tied to the political party in power. India's relations traditionally have been closer to the Awami League (AL) as opposed to the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). However, China has been able to maintain cordial working relationship with both the major parties in Bangladesh. India and Bangladesh had maritime and land disputes, however, in recent years there have been efforts to settle these disputes (Manocha, 2014). In July 2014, India and Bangladesh received the final verdict on their legal dispute surrounding the Sea Boundary from the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) at The Hague (Rashid, 2014). Given their cordial relations, both states have agreed to abide by the ruling. Similarly, both India and Bangladesh have settled their land boundary dispute through mutual agreement which resulted in the exchange of 111 enclaves from India and Bangladesh and 51 enclaves from Bangladesh to India (Guha, Chaudhury & Guha, 2017).

The international environment does have a substantial influence on Bangladesh's security decision-making processes. Bangladesh is one of the largest contributors of military personnel to United Nation's global peacekeeping missions and as per Bangladesh's Armed Forces Division (AFD) has provided over 160,000 military personnel to various United Nations (UN) peacekeeping missions in Congo, Mali, and Sudan among others (Bangladeshi Army, 2023). This is an important indicator to the country's commitment in upholding international peace and security (M. U. R. Choudhury, 2022). The security decisions of the nation are additionally shaped by regional dynamics and the nature of its interactions with neighbouring countries. Issues pertaining to border security, statelessness, and forced migration might potentially exert significant influence on Bangladesh's national security and decision-making processes (Wolf, 2013). Importantly, all these issues are directly related to Dhaka's relations with its neighbours (Ahamed, Rahman & Hossain, 2020).

Role of Military in National Security Issues

This section of the paper explores the role of the military in national security decision making. It uses the examples of the national security decision-making bodies such as National Committee for Intelligence Coordination (NCIC) and National Security Council (NSC) to get a sense of the military's role in decision making on national security issues since 2008.

One of the major reasons for military's continued influence in national security decision making is the absence of subject experts in the country on National security or military related issues (Wolf, 2013, pp. 20–25). The lack of such human resource in the civilian realm has meant that the civilian leadership is largely reliant on the Armed Forces Division of the Ministry of Defence for policy inputs on national security issues. As Siegfried Wolf argues, while the civilian leadership with the Prime Minister at the helm has been exercising institutional control; given the personal nature of the relationships and the strong network that the military possesses in various civilian organisations, the informal influence of the military on national security issues has continued undiminished (Wolf, 2013, p. 24).

Another area where the military has traditionally attempted to exercise its influence has been the issue of defence procurement. In the recent past, Bangladesh has relied on Chinese and Russian aid and credit to overcome its limited funding available for military procurements. Bangladesh has also increased defence collaboration with India (*Bangladesh Military Personnel*, n.d.). The defence budget for 2022 increased by 16.19 percent from 2020 (International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2020, 2022, p. 250). Experts like Ryan Smith (Smith, 2018) have argued that the focus on goal 2030 for its military's requirements has resulted in a separation between policy and budgeting and procurement practices. Furthermore, Ryan Smith argues that in Bangladesh the national security decision-making is carried out in a policy vacuum, given the absence of a defence policy or national security strategy. This he argues has resulted in wasteful expenditure on unnecessary systems while failing to meet genuine security needs resulting in an enhanced risk of corruption. The lack of defence or security experts in the civilian sector - which the political leadership can rely on - has only exacerbated the problem.

Shakhawat Liton and Partha Pratim Bhattacharjee writing in *The Daily Star* note that the Bangladeshi government has been making efforts to put together a defence policy. In May 2009, the Bangladesh Army had also pointed to the need for having a

defence policy in a report to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on the defence ministry. The Standing Committee had subsequently tasked the Defence Ministry and the Armed Forces Division to put together such a document (Liton & Bhattacharjee, 2018). While the Armed Forces Division (AFD) had prepared a classified document 'Forces Goal 2030' in 2009, however, a document outlining the country's national security strategy or defence strategy is yet to see the light of day.

Intelligence Agencies have traditionally been another domain that the military has traditionally controlled. Out of eight major intelligence agencies in Bangladesh, three are under the military's control or are headed by military officers. These intelligence agencies are National Security Intelligence (NSI), Directorate General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI), and the Special Security Force (SSF). The DGFI and NSI were formed after the Bangladeshi independence while the SSF was formed in June 1986 and have been headed by military officers. A.S.M Ashraf writing in the *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh* (Ashraf, 2014, pp. 70–71) has argued that both the NSI and DGFI have been criticised for having been used by successive governments as instruments to keep the opposition in check instead of focussing on their main task of keeping the government abreast of national security challenges.

In order to get an insight into the military's role and influence in current day decision-making on national security issues in Bangladesh, the paper studies the membership pattern (civilian and military) of two apex national security decision-making bodies in Bangladesh. These are the National Committee for Intelligence Co-ordination (NCIC) and the National Security Council (NSC). However, given the classified nature of discussions of these bodies, it is not possible to analyse the deliberations which led to decisions taken in these bodies. Therefore, this section will limit its ambit to only analysing the civilian and military membership of these bodies to get a sense of the nature of the civil-military relationship.

National Committee for Intelligence Co-ordination (NCIC): Bangladesh's National Committee for Intelligence Co-ordination (NCIC) is chaired by the Prime Minister. Since its inception under Sheikh Hasina, the NCIC has been advising and assisting the Prime Minister on national security and foreign policy issues. The committee brings together the main civilian and military intelligence outfits and serves as the prime minister's main body for the integration of intelligence on foreign, national, defence and internal security issues. The NCIC was set up after the 2009 Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) mutiny to coordinate efforts of various intelligence agencies in Bangladesh. The NCIC members include the Cabinet Secretary, Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister's office, Director Generals of NSI, DGFI, SSF, and Inspector General of Police. The NCIC is assisted by the chiefs of Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), Special Branch (SB), and the Criminal Investigation Division (CID) in performing its activities. A.S.M Ashraf has argued that the membership of the NCIC has been an attempt by the political leadership to address bureaucratic competition and balance civilian and military agencies, organisations. He argues that the NCIC is a conscious move away from the "earlier practice of informal coordination" and put in place a formal platform where heads of various agencies involved in national security meet the civilian leadership under the leadership of the Prime Minister to deliberate on various national security issues (Ashraf, 2014, pp. 69–74). The NCIC is chaired by the Prime Minister has ten members of which six members are from the civilian side, and four military members. The Table 1 below shows the current membership and affiliation of the

TABLE 1: Membership of the National Committee for Intelligence Coordination (NCIC)

Authority	Civilian/ Military	Name
Prime Minister (Chairperson)	Civilian	Sheik Hasina
Defence and Security Advisor to the Minister	Military	Tarique Ahmed Prime Siddique
Cabinet Secretary	Civilian	Md Mahbub Hossain
Principal Secretary to the PMO	Civilian	Md Tofazzel Hossain Miah
Director General of National Security Intelligence (NSI)	Military	Major General T.M. Jobaer
Director General of the Directorate General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI)	Military	Hamidul Haque
Inspector General of Police (IGP)	Civilian	Chowdhury Abdullah Al-Mamun
Director General of Special Security Force	Military	Major General Md Majibur Rahman
Director General of Rapid Action Battalion (RAB)	Civilian	M Khurshid Hossain
Chief of Special Branch	Civilian	Md. Monirul Islam
Chief of Criminal Investigation Department (CID)	Civilian	Mohammad Ali Mia

Source: Table compiled by authors from various sources

body compiled from various news reports.

National Security Council (NSC): The debate about the National Security Council in Bangladesh is an old one. Maj. Gen. (retd) A.K. Mohammad Ali Sikdar, Executive Director of Regional Anti-Terrorist Research Institute (RATRI) states that “if a National Security Council is constituted in Bangladesh in the way it is done in a democratic country, it will play a role in national security and democracy”. General Sikdar felt that a National Security Council “must be free from the influence of the politics of military culture”. Another security analyst, the Executive Director of the Institute of Conflict, Law and Development Studies (ICLDS) Maj Gen (retd) Md Abdur Rashid was of the view that a “National Security Council can be formed as an institutional body for taking a quick decision at the time of crisis as in the absence of such a body, the responsibility of taking such decisions will fall on one individual” (“National Security Council Should Be Formed to Overcome Crisis,” 2015).

In 1996 through a circular issued by the Sheikh Hasina government, a twenty-three member NSC was announced. However, news reports (Liton & Bhattacharjee, 2018) indicate that the Bangladesh National Security Council (NSC) has been operationalised with the Prime Minister of Bangladesh chairing the meetings of the body. The main duty of the NSC is to foster cooperation between the civil, military, and intelligence agencies and integration of national security and intelligence. The NSC has been established to take urgent decisions at the time of crisis related to

national security. News reports have indicated that the NSC has been meeting under Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's chairmanship during the Corona pandemic crisis (Liton & Bhattacharjee, 2018).

Conclusion

Civil-military relations (CMR) is a relationship between the civilian and the military and is often important for the endurance of the state against internal and external enemies. This is especially important in post-colonial countries given their nascent and fledging political structures and institutional frameworks. This article seeks to fill an existing gap in the literature as civil-military relations in Bangladesh is a relatively under researched area. After providing a holistic overview of the literature on civil-military relations beginning with Samuel P. Huntington's work *The Soldier and the State*, the article uses two analytical frameworks, put forth by Professor Veena Kukreja in her book *Civil Military Relations in South Asia: Pakistan, Bangladesh and India* and P.C. Saunders and Andrew Scobell's book *PLA Influence on China's National Security Policymaking*. These two books provide an interesting framework that has been modified to analyse civil-military relations in Bangladesh.

Using the above-mentioned framework, it is apparent that, the assassination of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and his associates lead to a crisis in political leadership and resultant weakening of democratic institutions and legitimacy of political parties. This provided space for the military to assume a dominant role in the Bangladesh polity. Subsequently, between 1975 and 1990 General Ziaur Rahman and General Ershad ruled over the country with the civilian leadership largely absent or in the background. This situation began to change since the 1990 elections however; the civilian leadership has been in a dominant position vis-à-vis their military counterparts since the 2008 elections. This is also the result of the political leadership being successful in delivering good economic growth, curbing unemployment, and free and fair elections being held regularly in the country. Since 2008, as a result of the successes of the civilian governments in delivering robust economic growth, the military's role in economic policy has been quite minimal. Similarly, its role in the foreign policy has also been reduced due to the dominance of civilian political leadership.

The military's role has not yet been completely reduced in the country, as the article states, military officers still occupy key positions in various ministries. The military also imparts training to other police and paramilitary organisations like RAB and BDR, which has ensured that they have been able to develop and strengthen their institutional linkages with the key ministries of Home and Defence in addition to the Armed Forces Division (AFD). In addition, given the lack of expertise on national security and defence issues amongst civilians, the military is largely relied upon by the political leadership for advice on policy issues relating to defence procurement and national security policy. Also, the military has played an important role in assisting the civilian administration in disaster relief operations post floods and cyclones which have affected Bangladesh quite frequently. Given this, the military continues to be perceived as an important institution.

One major area where the civilian leadership still relies on the military is for their expertise on national security issues. On such matters, the military continues to play an important role in providing inputs for the decisions to be taken by the civilian

leadership. Thus, while the military is no longer in a decision-making capacity, it definitely continues to be in a position of providing valuable inputs to the political, civilian leadership thereby acting as a catalyst in decisions on national security and related issues.

Thus, in Bangladesh, one has witnessed the civil-military relations going from dominant military control to dominant civilian control. The growing political institutionalisation and stable democratic government in Bangladesh, has resulted in an increase in the role and influence of the political leadership in national security issues and decision-making bodies which were earlier under the control of the Bangladesh's military. This is also evident in the fact that the Sheikh Hasina has had three terms at the helm of Bangladesh which has provided a long term of political stability in the country. It remains to be seen whether the civilian control over the military will continue in future in case there is a change in the political regime. Despite any political changes, if the civilian control over the military remains, it can be safely argued that the nature of civil military relations in Bangladesh has changed from dominant military control to one that of dominant civilian control.

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