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# The Contribution of Commonwealth Armed Forces in UN Peacekeeping: The Case of Bangladesh

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## ABSTRACT

Bangladesh is one of the top troop contributing countries to UN Peacekeeping Operations. This paper traces the antecedents and history of the Bangladesh Armed Forces and follows Bangladesh's participation in various peacekeeping operations over the past 25 years including Rwanda, Sierra Leone and Democratic Republic of Congo.

## KEYWORDS

Bangladesh; peacekeeping; Armed Forces; United Nations; Rwanda; Sierra Leone; Democratic Republic of Congo

## Introduction

It has been nearly a quarter of a century since the armed forces of Bangladesh first started taking part in United Nations Peacekeeping Operations (UNPKOs). Since then Bangladesh's troops and officers donning blue helmets have worked in various conflict affected regions of the world. While Bangladesh's participation in peacekeeping operations has not been without criticism<sup>1</sup>, on the whole Bangladesh's performance in such operations has been satisfactory and it is reflected in the fact that Bangladesh has been one of the top troop contributing countries (TCCs) to UNPKOs over the past few years.<sup>2</sup> As this special issue of *The Round Table* commemorates the fiftieth anniversary of peacekeeping by the Commonwealth armed forces, it is befitting that participation of Bangladesh, a member of the Commonwealth, in UN peacekeeping missions should also be subjected to an academic study.<sup>3</sup> However, Bangladesh's Armed Forces have a different trajectory from those of other Commonwealth members such as India and Pakistan and while Bangladesh shares similarities with the armed forces of both India and Pakistan, differences also prevail. First, the paper will trace the historical origin of Bangladesh Armed Forces. Second, the paper explains the birth of Bangladesh Armed Forces from the Pakistan Armed Forces and the impact this birth had on the nature of the institution. The third and final section discusses Bangladesh's participation in various peacekeeping operations over the past 25 years and shows how the nature of Bangladesh Armed Forces is reflected in these operations. While all missions come with their own distinct characteristics and challenges, three particular missions have been identified and discussed in detail.

## The Birth of Bangladesh and its Armed Forces

The beginning of the Bangladesh Army goes back to more than 300 years to the mercantile period of British expansion. Representatives of British commercial capital arrived in the Indian subcontinent to trade and plunder. The first armed forces comprised Indian troops led by Europeans and these forces were organised by government sponsored-companies such as the British East India Company. Not surprisingly, the legacy of three hundred years of British military presence in India is most apparent in the two successor military establishments, namely the Indian Army and the Pakistan Army. The Bangladesh Army tracing its origins from both these institutions shares both similarities and differences with them and it will be helpful to discern such features for properly understanding Bangladesh Army's participation in UN peacekeeping missions.

Initially, the British Indian army recruited from areas which first came under the domination of the British: Bombay, Madras, and especially Bengal. However, after the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857, the 82 Bengal regiments were disbanded and a freeze on recruitment from this area was imposed until 1910.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, the British developed the myth of the martial races which was to have a profound impact upon the development of military in the Indian subcontinent.

Lord Roberts of Kandahar, who served as Commander-in-Chief of the Indian Army from 1885 to 1893, can be credited with (or blamed for) introducing the policy of fostering this myth. Roberts was one of the great military heroes of British India and the views of 'Bobs Bahadur' became doctrine for a whole generation of Indian Army officers. Roberts' theory of the military superiority of certain classes never waned and continued long after the British left India.<sup>5</sup> In defence of Lord Roberts, it should be noted that his outlook was essentially that of a tough professional who was concerned about the looming Russian threat and wanted to build up an army which would effectively be able to meet the challenge. Building on his long experience of service in India, Roberts argued that the best available material came from the north-west part of the Indian subcontinent, and that the army should be recruited from that area. He also felt that the class regiment fought better, and the classes that were recruited should be thus organised.<sup>6</sup> Acting on this principle, the British came to accept that there existed in India certain ethnic, regional or caste groups that were vigorous, courageous and warlike, and which ought to be recruited into the army. Accordingly, most recruitment for the British Indian army from the latter part of the nineteenth century onwards was done in India's north-west regions from the Punjabis, Pathans, Dogras, Jats and the Gurkhas of Nepal.<sup>7</sup> At the same time, other 'races' were identified as not possessing the required martial spirit and Bengalis were placed in this category.

The newly-formed Pakistan Army which emerged from the partition of the Indian subcontinent continued to bear the myth of the martial races, albeit, with a few exceptions. Stephen Cohen points out the Pakistan Army in the years 1947–1971 was ethnically more imbalanced than the British Indian or Indian Army of the same period. East Bengal, which became a part of Pakistan and was subsequently called East Pakistan, was grossly under-represented in the Pakistan Army. In fact, many Pakistani officers regarded Bengalis as particularly unsuited for military life.<sup>8</sup> The Pakistan Army, therefore, continued the British pattern of recruiting mainly from the 'martial races' of West Punjab and North-West Frontier Province. The nature of the organisation was aptly described by one observer when he wrote that in 1971, the Pakistan Army was made up of 300,000 troops, mostly recruited from those

sections of the Punjabi and Pathan peasantry who traditionally provided infantry for the British. The senior officers of this Army were scions of the feudal aristocracy and gentry of Punjab and the North-West Frontier, with a sprinkling of wealthy immigrants from Gujarat and Hyderabad.<sup>9</sup> The result of such recruitment policy was obvious. In the first decade following partition, East Pakistani or Bengali participation in the national power elite was limited. As the military did not adopt any conscious policy to overturn the imbalance, Bengalis were almost completely excluded from the military. Thus, in spite of the fact that Bengalis made up nearly 50 per cent of Pakistan's population, they were a paltry 5 per cent in the military elite.<sup>10</sup> Bare numbers tell the story. Out of 897 officers in the rank of Major or above in the Pakistan Army in 1956 only 15 were Bengalis, the majority of them Majors.<sup>11</sup>

Such discrimination along with lopsided economic development rankled Bengali political elites. The sense of alienation experienced by Bengalis had deep roots in the way the Pakistan state was constituted and dominated from the Western side. The inability of the Bengalis who formed more than half of the population of undivided Pakistan to secure a meaningful and balanced representation in the two main non-elected institutions of the state—the military and the civil bureaucracy—was made worse by the fact that democratic political processes were aborted in the 1950s and never got back on track. The politics of exclusion and the economics of inequality forced Bengalis to push for provincial autonomy. The struggle between Bengali politics and the imperatives of the military-civil bureaucratic state which was undivided Pakistan proved irreconcilable and led to the armed struggle of independence in 1971.<sup>12</sup>

Bangladesh was born in a war and so was its army.<sup>13</sup> When the Pakistan Army began to move against the Bengali population on the night of 25 March 1971, its first objective was to disarm the Bengali units of Pakistan Army. These units comprised six battalions of the East Bengal Regiment (EBR), numbering about 6000 men. In addition, there were 13–14,000 lightly-armed troops of the border security force, the East Pakistan Rifles.<sup>14</sup> Disarming these units proved more difficult than expected and resulted in a good number of Bengali officers and men rebelling against the Pakistan state. It was around this nucleus of trained fighters that the Bangladesh independence movement gathered and gelled into a fighting force.<sup>15</sup>

The 1971 war obliterated the distinction between soldiers and civilians and erased the traditional barriers between officers and ordinary troops. A sense of brotherhood forged during the 1971 War of Liberation replaced the conventional armed forces' traditional hierarchy. Such bonds, tempered by the heat of a vicious conflict, turned the majority of soldiers into an exclusive fraternity which posed a serious challenge to the peacetime civilian chain of command when it was restored after the war. The 1971 war also saw the presence of various political ideologies including egalitarian socialist ideals and many of the Bengali freedom fighters were imbued with such ideas. An important segment of the newly established Bangladesh armed forces after the 1971 war was thus more influenced by the vicissitudes of a bloody conflict than by the regimental traditions of peacetime traditional soldiering.

To such politically conscious armed forces was added another unique characteristic: the issue of 'repatriated' officers and soldiers, Bengali servicemen who were confined in West Pakistan and could not take part in the war.<sup>16</sup> A total of 28,000 (including 1100 officers) were 'repatriated' and their arrival from Pakistan virtually doubled the Bangladesh Army's ranks overnight and added to the army's skill-set.<sup>17</sup> However, their return was not easily accepted and led to resentment and divisions within the newly formed armed forces of Bangladesh.<sup>18</sup> Such a situation led to the division into two main groups—those who had

taken part in the Liberation War and prided themselves as Freedom Fighter officers and the 'repatriated' officers. The former were given promotion with two years ante-dated seniority and this meant 'repatriated' officers often had to work under those who had previously been their junior officers. The Freedom Fighter officers on the basis of their ante-dated seniority emphasised that they had participated in the freedom struggle and therefore deserved their new status. The counter-argument was no one had stayed back in West Pakistan on their own and such an ante-dated seniority was to break the chain of command and seniority rule in a disciplined force with deleterious effect on its effective operation.<sup>19</sup>

The difficulties faced by the newly-formed Bangladesh Army did not stay confined within the controversy over the nature of the officer class. Difficulties also arose over the issue of the nature of the army itself. One group of officers and troops were for the retention of the conventional army patterned on the British Indian and Pakistan armies.<sup>20</sup> This was against the viewpoint of many of the troops who had taken part in the 1971 war. For them, a return to the norms and behaviour of a conventional army establishment was unacceptable. Participation in the war had fully politicised them and adversely influenced their opinion and respect for the command and allegiance found in traditional armies. Added to this volatility was the emergence of a group within the Army which advocated removal of the trappings of the old order and aimed to form a new classless army that was to engage in construction and productive tasks so as not to be a burden on the peasantry.<sup>21</sup> The majority of this group joined the underground wing of Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD), a leftist party, and formed cells of *Biplobi Shainik Sangstha* (Revolutionary Soldiers' Association) on the pattern of 'Soviet of Soldiers' which emerged in the Tsarist Russian Army prior to the 1917 Revolution. The growth of such a leftist group within armed forces was an unprecedented development in the military annals of South Asia.<sup>22</sup> These cleavages and rancour within the post-1971 Bangladesh Army along with the failures of governance by political leadership led to a profound sense of disillusionment. It was under such circumstances Bangladesh underwent a series of coups, counter-coups and military uprising which led to bloodshed and political uncertainty.<sup>23</sup>

From the mid-1980s, as birth pangs subsided, Bangladesh experienced relative stability and this also affected the military. As years rolled on, the military rulers who had assumed state power and subsequent political leaders in charge of the state took measures to alleviate the concerns of the military. A good salary, lucrative fringe benefits and the prospect of rapid promotion within an expanding military all helped to keep the military reasonably satisfied.<sup>24</sup> Since 1982 Bangladesh has not experienced any military coup and in spite of a raucous political atmosphere, the military has refrained from directly assuming state power. In the years 1996 and 2013–14, when political disturbances affected the country and speculations were rife about an imminent take-over of state control, the Bangladesh Army refused to act in this manner and insisted on a political resolution to the crises. In 2007, the military did intervene but in an indirect manner and left a facade of civilian rule in place during the two-year-long hiatus.<sup>25</sup> Discerning the pattern of Bangladesh's Army behaviour in the years after the restoration of democracy in Bangladesh in 1990, one observer remarked that the Army has undergone significant changes which may have profound implications for Bangladesh's politics. One was the new intake of Bangladesh Military Academy graduates and the passing away from the scene of Pakistan-era officers. The former are seen as largely free of various divisions and more professional in outlook. Another has been the role the Bangladesh Army has been playing in UNPKOs in various conflict-afflicted parts

of the world.<sup>26</sup> Elsewhere we have also argued that participation in UNPKOs has led to a concordance by political elites, society and military itself on the role of Bangladesh's Army.<sup>27</sup>

This background on the birth of Bangladesh Army shows it shares similarities with the British Indian Army and Pakistan Army in terms of training and professionalism. However, it also shows that the Bangladesh Army debunks the myth of 'martial races' and that, born amidst the crucible of a vicious conflict, it often differs from its predecessors in its nature and *modus operandi*.

## Bangladesh in United Nations Peacekeeping Operations

Bangladesh has been taking part in UNPKOs for nearly three decades. The contribution of the armed forces of Bangladesh is lauded as one of the key ingredients in international peacekeeping endeavours under the auspices of the UN. In 1988, 17 years after Bangladesh's independence and the creation of the Bangladesh Armed Forces, Dhaka sent 15 military observers to the UN Iran–Iraq Military Observation Group (UNIIMOG) mission.<sup>28</sup> In 1991, Bangladesh Army contingents with 1002 peacekeepers led by an infantry unit first joined the UN Assistance Mission in Cambodia (UNAMIC). Since then, Bangladeshi peacekeepers have served in missions in the Middle East, Africa, Europe and Asia. Within a short period of time, Bangladesh emerged as a leading provider of UN peacekeepers; and as of 2014, the Bangladeshi troops have participated in 54 missions in 40 countries (see Appendix 1).<sup>29</sup> In December 2015, Bangladesh had 7255 troops, 69 military experts and 1172 police personnel deployed in various UN missions.<sup>30</sup> As of 2015, Bangladesh has contributed a total of 134,947 personnel from uniformed services (armed forces and police) in UN peacekeeping missions.<sup>31</sup> The armed forces contributed 119,971 (89%) and the police contributed 14,976 (11%) of this total. 124 Bangladeshi uniformed peacekeepers have died while serving under the UN flag and more than 130 have been seriously injured.<sup>32</sup>

Bangladesh has generally maintained deployment timelines as indicated by the UN Security Council Resolutions. Moreover, the Bangladesh Army has the capability to deploy one infantry unit within 48 hours of a request being made and medical and engineering units are sent within a two to three weeks timeframe. In Mali and the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Bangladesh was first to deploy peacekeepers under the aegis of the United Nations. The Bangladesh Army is in the process of signing Rapid Deployment Capability related MOU to increase preparation level and contribute within the shortest possible timeframe.

Other than army units, Bangladesh deployed its first naval contribution to a UN mission in 2005 when a naval contingent was sent to Sudan. In 2010, Bangladesh Navy took a big step when it agreed to participate in the Multinational Maritime Task Force in the Mediterranean and contributed a naval frigate and an offshore patrol vessel to the UN Interim Forces in Lebanon (UNIFIL). On 12 May 2014, two naval warships BNS *Ali Haidar* and BNS *Nirmul* joined the UNIFIL mission with 320 sailors and naval officers. They replaced BNS *Osman* and BNS *Madhumati* which were deployed to patrol the Mediterranean as part of the mission mandate.<sup>33</sup> The Bangladesh Air Force (BAF) has contributed to UN peacekeeping operations since 1993. As of June 2014, BAF has deployed three Bell-212 helicopters in Côte d'Ivoire, six Mi-17 helicopters and one C-130B aircraft in the Democratic Republic of Congo.<sup>34</sup> Bangladesh Armed Forces has worked under multidisciplinary UN mandates. The mandates included verification of ceasefire, conduct election and referendum, specialised engineering tasks, disarmament,

demobilisation and reintegration of ex-combatants, arrangement of surrendering of militias with weapons, ammunition, and drugs, security and humanitarian assistance, security sector reform, surveillance and maritime interdiction operations at sea, casualty and medical evacuation, and transportation of personnel and cargo. In September 2015, BAF sent 110 members and three Mi-17 helicopters to a UN Stabilisation Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH).<sup>35</sup>

The discussion of the historical-political-strategic context of the evolution of the Bangladesh Armed Forces in the earlier sections of this paper provides critical insights regarding the progressive trend of Bangladesh's participation in the UN-led peace support initiatives. In addition to this, there exist financial and normative issues that facilitate the policy decisions regarding Bangladesh's participation in peace missions. Bangladeshi peacekeepers contribute to national economy by earning financial benefits from their participation under the UN. In a ten year period, from 2001–10, the Government of Bangladesh received US\$1.28 billion from the UN as compensation for troop contributions and contingent-owned equipment.<sup>36</sup> Bangladesh Armed Forces earned US\$72 million by participation in peacekeeping operations in 2012–13.<sup>37</sup> The benefits gained from contingent-owned equipment have also contributed positively for Bangladesh. UN peacekeeping helps the Bangladesh Armed Forces to purchase and maintain military equipment to sustain a continuous supply to UN-led missions.<sup>38</sup> There are, however, controversies on whether the economic benefit gained by participating in UN peacekeeping is the sole economic rationale for the Bangladesh Armed Forces to pursue for its increased participation. One might argue that due to the vibrantly booming private sector, there are more economic opportunities for the members of the armed forces which make senior officers less interested in UN missions as the only financially lucrative venture.<sup>39</sup> However, this argument cannot be applied to the soldiers and non-commissioned officers, who are less skilled to tap the benefits of the private sector.<sup>40</sup> For them, the economic opportunity in UN missions stays as a crucial source to improve their economic condition.

Beyond financial motivations, the Bangladesh Armed Forces pursue UN peacekeeping opportunities in order to promote a positive image of Bangladesh in the international arena. According to Norrie MacQueen, Bangladesh is one of those top troop contributing countries which considers its UNPKO attachment as an essential part of its international identity.<sup>41</sup> *The Economist* observes that donning blue helmets has given Bangladesh a chance to be known for something other than bad politics and natural disasters.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, peacekeeping has institutional impacts on Bangladesh Armed Forces. The impact ranges from the enhancement of professional skills to gathering of latest doctrines and military knowledge. Peacekeeping opportunities have led the Armed Forces to introduce new state-of-the-art training institutions like the Bangladesh Institute of Peace Support Operations and Training (BIPSOT).<sup>43</sup> The Institute offers world-class tailor-made training to both national and foreign potential peacekeepers and is funded by the Government of Bangladesh and international development partners.<sup>44</sup> Bangladesh Army, Navy and Air Force also advertise the prospect of taking part in UNPKOs in their promotional items for attracting new recruits.<sup>45</sup>

### **Earlier Missions: Volatile Terrains and Critical Learning Experiences for Bangladesh—1988–1998**

After the successful 1988 mission in United Nations Iran–Iraq Military Observer Group (UNIIMOG), Bangladesh sent 25 military observers to the UN Transition Assistance

Group (UNTAG) in Namibia. In addition to UN-led missions, Bangladesh participated in a non-UN mission in the 1991 Gulf War. A total of 2193 soldiers from the Bangladesh Army joined the United States-led coalition forces to serve various post-intervention stabilisation mandates.<sup>46</sup> During this task of sweeping land mines in post-war Kuwait, 59 soldiers had lost their lives and many more were injured.<sup>47</sup> Kuwait still maintains strategic ties with the Bangladesh Armed Forces and hires experts from the Bangladesh Army in times of need. Additionally, Bangladesh's role in the US-led coalition forces improved bilateral strategic relations with United States.<sup>48</sup> Since then, the Bangladeshi and US forces conduct joint training and exercises as part of their regular military activities.

Bangladesh sent its first battalion-sized contingent to the UN Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC). During the 1990s, Bangladesh contributed to UN peacekeeping missions in Rwanda, Mozambique, Somalia, Haiti, Angola, Sierra Leone, DRC, East Timor, and parts of the former Yugoslavia. Bangladesh participated in almost all the major missions in Africa during this period. Some of the significant missions were: Mozambique (February 1993–December 1994), Rwanda (October 1993–February 1994), and Somalia (July 1993–February 1995).<sup>49</sup> Bangladesh participated in United Nations Operations in Somalia (UNOSOM I & II) from 1992–1995. The UN described Somalia's vulnerable condition in UNOSOM I & II as a continually deteriorating situation due to the threats of the conflicting parties and the pressure of downsizing the mission caused by the withdrawal of European and American forces.<sup>50</sup> Bangladeshi peacekeepers made a major contribution in ensuring the safe exit of other troop contributing countries from UNOSOM. Two contingents of the Bangladesh Army were deployed in key strategic areas such as Mogadishu sea port to ensure a smooth withdrawal of the UN forces from Somalia.<sup>51</sup>

The United Nations Assistance Mission in Rwanda (UNAMIR), which remains a tragic experience for the United Nations and the TCCs, took place from October 1993 to March 1996. Bangladesh contributed troops to this mission along with European, African and Asian colleagues.<sup>52</sup> From the very beginning, one of the major problems of the UNAMIR was the lack of interest of European countries in sending troops, providing airlift and finance for an international force.<sup>53</sup> In this context, Ghana and Bangladesh sent two large contingents for UNAMIR. However, they lacked proper training exposure and technical resources to serve the mission properly.<sup>54</sup> Major General Romeo Dallaire, then Force Commander of the UNAMIR during the 1994 Rwandan genocide, claims in his book *Shake Hands with the Devil: The Failure of Humanity in Rwanda* that Bangladeshi troops lacked preparation and commitment to undertake the mission mandate and they were more reliant on Dhaka's command than that of the Force Commander in the mission.<sup>55</sup> Major General Dallaire issued letters to senior Bangladeshi army officers and UN headquarters concerning the consistent disregard of the Bangladeshi contingent to his orders to protect civilians in Rwanda.<sup>56</sup> Nevertheless, Major General Dallaire also pointed out that the powerful actors in this case—the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) and United Nations Security Council (UNSC)—had equally failed to provide prudent decisions during the emergency periods prior to the outbreak of fully-fledged massacre in Rwanda.<sup>57</sup> The Human Rights Watch report *Ignoring Genocide* clearly depicts how the concerned top brass of the UN had failed to predict the potential cataclysmic nature of the problem and failed to revise the mandates of the mission to properly equip and guide the troops.<sup>58</sup> Amidst criticisms regarding their less proactive roles, the Bangladeshi peacekeeping battalion sheltered nearly 400 internally displaced persons in their force compound in Kigali and provided foods



regularly till the troops finally departed from Rwanda on 25 April 1994.<sup>59</sup> Although it was not a successful mission in many ways, nonetheless, it was a critical learning experience for the Bangladesh Armed Forces.

## **The Second Decade of Bangladesh in UN Mission: Proactive Peacekeeping—1998–2008**

United Nations Assistance Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) was a significant mission for Bangladesh. The time was also crucial as by 1999 Bangladeshi armed forces had already gathered a decade's experience in peacekeeping missions before participating under the UN mandates in Sierra Leone. It is to be noted here that the mandate of the mission was revised in 2000 to incorporate enforcing measures with regard to proactive peacekeeping for more effective protection of the civilians.<sup>60</sup> The same resolution also permitted the deployment of forces in strategic locations of the capital Freetown to recapture it from the control of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF).<sup>61</sup> Further to UN's request, Bangladesh responded with a quick reinforcement of troops, and finally, managed to deploy a brigade size force to Freetown in compliance with the extended mandate of the mission.<sup>62</sup> This experience was critical for Bangladesh Armed Forces as it has regularised the rapid deployment mechanism as part of its national system as a result of the UN directives.<sup>63</sup> Bangladesh Army, however, experienced one of its gravest fatalities during its service in UNAMSIL. Fifteen Army officers died in a plane crash in Benin on 25 December 2003. Thirteen of them were serving UNAMSIL and the remaining two were posted to the UN Mission in Liberia.<sup>64</sup> Nevertheless, the overall contribution of the Bangladeshi troops in Sierra Leone was noteworthy. In 2003, Sierra Leone's President visited Bangladesh to acknowledge the contribution of Bangladeshi peacekeepers and proposed to strengthen ties in enhancing development of both the nations.<sup>65</sup>

Bangladesh Army units were deployed in DRC under the direction of UN in 2003 as the Interim Multilateral Emergency Force (IMEF) withdrew itself from the country. Between July and August 2003, Bangladesh Army sent its first units of peacekeepers as the mission commenced from September. Bangladeshi peacekeepers have played an active role in improving the security situation of the country and alleviating the suffering of the Congolese. DRC's first free and fair election in 46 years was held on 30 July 2006, one of the most complex elections the UN had ever helped to organise.<sup>66</sup> Bangladeshi blue helmets under MONUC and later MONUSCO remained on the ground and continued to implement multiple political, military, rule of law and capacity building tasks, including resolving ongoing conflicts in various parts of the country.<sup>67</sup> Given the fragile state of the country's various institutions, peacekeepers from Bangladesh have often undertaken proactive missions to ensure peace and stability.

The Bangladesh contingent has provided extensive humanitarian support through vocational trainings, establishing schools and offering knowledge on health-related crises caused by Ebola and AIDS. Bangladeshi peacekeepers' efforts have been praised by the United Nations and other concerned stakeholders. Bangladeshi troops have been involved in similar activities in Liberian (UNMIL) mission.<sup>68</sup> Bangladesh Army's engineering brigade constructed airfields, helipads and roads, making them accessible for both the UNMIL operations and for the Liberian people.<sup>69</sup> The then acting Special Representative of the Secretary-General Mr Aeneas C. Chuma hailed the Bangladeshi troops for their multidimensional

contribution in protecting the lives of the civilians by minimising cross-border challenges followed by effective negotiations with Guinean authorities and United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI).<sup>70</sup> This demonstrates how Bangladesh has improved upon the shortcomings of the first decade of its participation in UNPKOs, and gradually stepped into a more proactive peacekeeping during the second decade. However, Bangladeshi peacekeepers have been criticised as 'soft warriors' or 'weak' in relations to decision-making during a conflict/combat-like situation in Liberia.<sup>71</sup> Under the circumstances, it has been identified that Bangladesh's pattern of engagement is more suitable for development related activities in post-conflict countries, raising concerns on Bangladesh's potential role in future robust peacekeeping.

### **Bangladesh's Third Decade in UN Peacekeeping Missions: Challenges of Robustness—2008 onwards**

Bangladesh has started its third decade of UNPKO engagement with new responsibilities and challenges. Up to December 2015, Bangladesh has been participating in ten UN peacekeeping operations, some of which like the missions in Liberia, Ivory and DRC continued from the second decade. Bangladesh has also contributed troops to Mali, Central African Republic (CAR), South Sudan, and Western Sahara in 2013–14.

The changing nature of the peace operations all over the world has generated more expectations from the TCCs with regard to the protection of the civilians, collection of intelligence in the conflict-prone areas, use of sophisticated technologies in reducing casualties of all concerned stakeholders, among others. In addition, the UN *New Partnership Agenda: Charting a New Horizon for United Nations Peacekeeping* report offers an ambitious agenda to develop capacities of TCCs and PCCs in bolstering the effectiveness of peacekeeping. For Bangladesh, this requires a broadening of internal and external partnerships with the UN and regional organisations in future.<sup>72</sup>

United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI) started in 2004 and Bangladesh has been contributing to this mission since its inception. In the last ten years of UNOCI, the involvement of Bangladeshi troops has been transformed with the changing mandates of the mission.<sup>73</sup> As of January 2015, Bangladesh maintains two infantry battalions, signal, medical and engineering corps in strategically significant districts of Côte d'Ivoire.<sup>74</sup> The Bangladeshi Battalion (BANBAT) lies in the North-Western part of the Côte d'Ivoire, covering an area of about 55,320 sq km. This is a volatile zone and is bounded by Mali to the North, Guinea and Liberia to the West. The peacekeepers have to maintain regular patrols to protect the civilians from diverse threats coming across the borders. Bangladeshi troops provided enormous support to the 2010 national election and local elections in 2013.<sup>75</sup> The signal corps of BANBAT supported the Independent Election Commission (IEC) of the Côte d'Ivoire with high frequency radio technologies to maintain communications with the regional election offices.<sup>76</sup> The Bangladesh Army also provided these communication facilities to the Integrated Command Centre (ICC) in Côte d'Ivoire during the 2010 national elections, which have contributed to averting grave security situations during the election period.<sup>77</sup>

The Bangladeshi contingent received Force Commander's commendation for the successful completion of the local and regional elections in April 2013. Bangladeshi troops also supported the routine tasks of the Ivorian Security Forces (ISF), which included

joint patrols with the ISF in the adjacent areas rendered by transportation from the UN.<sup>78</sup> Bangladeshi peacekeepers conducted civil-military cooperation and humanitarian assistance programmes like constructing schools in local areas. They have provided training to local farmers on seasonal cultivation along with introducing agricultural know-how under a project 'Live Green'. Bangladeshi troops have conducted medical camps, distributed free drinking water and medicines to the locals. These activities made BANBAT popular among the local population. The wide-range of activities of the Bangladeshi troops, in its third decade of peacekeeping reflects strong commitment for multidimensional peace support operations under the auspices of the United Nations.

Bangladesh enhanced its rapid deployment levels by contributing troops to the UN-led mission in Mali (MINUSMA). It sent a 112-member contingent of Bangladesh Army in April 2014 with a commitment of sending six contingents of battalion size and a naval unit.<sup>79</sup> As of December 2014, Bangladesh has deployed roughly thirteen hundred troops in Mali (see Appendix 1). Another recent deployment of Bangladeshi troops took place in UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Central African Republic (MINUSCA). In April 2014, UNSC approved a 12000-strong force considering the deteriorating condition of Central African Republic.<sup>80</sup> Despite the need for a rapid deployment of soldiers, the UN and TCCs were unable to coordinate a swift allotment of troops in MINUSCA. Bangladesh has already contributed nearly a contingent of approximately 900 soldiers from Bangladesh Army in this mission (see Appendix 1). Three soldiers were badly injured due to an ambush conducted by the rebels in October 2014.<sup>81</sup> Both Mali and CAR pose the growing trend of asymmetric threats involved in the UN peacekeeping operations in the contemporary time. In spite of all these challenges, the Government of Bangladesh has committed to send troops as per requirements of the UN. In the 2015 UN Summit on Peacekeeping Operations, the Prime Minister of Bangladesh reiterated her government's support to train the blue helmets for quickest deployment, and provide infantry battalions, formed police units, helicopters, technical units, and other assets to fulfil the needs in peacekeeping missions.<sup>82</sup> She also mentioned about the adoption of a national peacekeeping strategy paper that would prepare Bangladesh to better respond to the growing needs of the multidimensional missions. All suggest that Bangladesh is serious about ensuring steadfast support to difficult UN peacekeeping missions and also adamant about holding on to the country's position as a top troop contributing country.

## Conclusion

Bangladesh Armed Forces have travelled a long way since their inception from the ashes of the liberation struggle of 1971. As discussed earlier, they share certain characteristics with their predecessors, namely the British Indian Army and the Pakistan Army. However, the exigencies of colonial institutional building in British India and post-colonial Pakistan left Bengalis with little or no military experience. It was only in the later years of the undivided Pakistan state that a small number of Bengalis were able to carve out a space for themselves in the Pakistan Army. Post-1971 Bangladesh saw the creation of Bangladesh Armed Forces that embraced both similarities and differences from the entities from which it traces their origins. As this article has shown, Bangladeshis, historically seen as unsuitable for military services, have brought a less bellicose approach to peacekeeping and this 'soft' approach<sup>83</sup> coupled with colonial legacy of professionalism and training may have helped Bangladesh

perform well in traditional peacekeeping missions of the last three decades. The question of how Bangladesh will fare in the era of more robust peacekeeping will surely keep academics busy in coming days.

## Notes

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## Appendix 1. Bangladesh in Completed and Ongoing UN Missions (as of June 2016)

	UN Mission	Duration	No. of troops
<b>Asia</b>			
1.	United Nations Iran-Iraq Military Observer Group (UNIIMOG)	Aug 1988–Feb 1991	31
2.	United Nations Advance Mission in Cambodia (UNAMIC)	Oct 1991–Mar 1992	1002
3.	United Nations Transition Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC)	Feb 1992–Sep 1993	
4.	United Nations Military Liaison Team (Cambodia) (UNMLT)	Nov 1993–May 1994	01
5.	United Nations Good Offices Mission in Afghanistan and Pakistan (UNGOMAP)	Feb 1989–Feb 1990	02
6.	United Nations Special Mission in Afghanistan (UNSMIA)	Feb 1994–May 1996	
7.	United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA)	Mar 2002–Mar 2007	03
8.	United Nations Mission of Observers in Tajikistan (UNMOT)	Dec 1994–May 2000	34
9.	United Nations Iraq Kuwait Observation Mission (UNIKOM)	Apr 1991–Oct 2003	7911
10.	United Nations Guard Contingent in Iraq (UNGCI)	Oct 1991–Nov 2003	90
11.	United Nations Monitoring Verification and Inspection Commission (UNMOVIC)	Dec 1997–Jun 2007	
12.	United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET)	Oct 1999–May 2002	1293
13.	United Nations Mission of Support in East Timor (UNMISSET)	May 2002–May 2005	
14.	United Nations Office in Timor-Leste (UNOTIL)	May 2005–May 2006	
15.	United Nations Supervision Mission in Syria (UNSMIS)	Apr 2012–Aug 2012	16
16.	United Nations Integrated Mission in Timor-Leste (UNMIT)	Aug 2006–Nov 2012	1311
17.	United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL)	Since April 2012	1
<b>Africa</b>			
18.	United Nations Transition Assistance Group (UNTAG)	Apr 1989–Mar 1990	25
19.	United Nations Operation in Somalia-I (UNOSOM-I)	Apr 1992–Mar 1993	05
20.	United Nations Operation in Somalia-II (UNOSOM-II)	Mar 1993–Mar 1995	1967
21.	United Nations Operations in Mozambique (ONUMOZ)	Dec 1992–Dec 1994	2468
22.	United Nations Observer Mission Uganda-Rwanda (UNOMOR)	Jun 1993–Sep 1994	20
23.	United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR)	Oct 1993–Mar 1996	990
24.	United Nations Observer Mission in Liberia (UNOMIL)	Sep 1993–Sep 1997	129
25.	United Nations Angola Verification Mission (UNAVEM-III)	Feb 1995–Jun 1997	470
26.	United Nations Assistance Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL)	Oct 1999–Dec 2005	11,908
27.	United Nations Integrated Office in Sierra Leone (UNIOSIL)	Dec 2005–Dec 2008	03
28.	United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE)	Sep 2000–Jul 2008	1093
29.	United Nations Integrated Office in Burundi (BINUB)	Jan 2007–Dec 2008	01
30.	United Nations Mission in the Central African Republic and Chad (MINURCAT)	2008–2010	09
31.	African Union Mission for Somalia (AMISOM)	Nov 2009–Apr 2011	01

(Continued)



**Appendix 1.** (Continued)

	UN Mission	Duration	No. of troops
32.	The United Nations Support Office for AMISOM (UNSOA)	Jun 2010–Aug 2011	01
33.	United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA)	Jun 2011–Jul 2011	01
34.	United Nations Office for West Africa (UNOWA)	Apr 2009–Apr 2012	02
35.	United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI)	Since April 2004	24,269
36.	United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL)	Since September 2004	22,392
37.	United Nations Mission in Sudan (UNMIS)	2005–2011	8004
38.	United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS)	Since July 2011	1221
39.	UN Stabilization Mission in DR Congo (MONUSCO)	Since July 2003	15,208
40.	United Nations Assistance Mission in Darfur (UNAMID)	Since July 2007	2035
41.	UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO)	Since 2003	172
42.	UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Central African Republic (MINUSCA)	Since April 2014	842
43.	UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA)	Since June 2013	1321
44.	UN Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM)	Since January 2014	1
45.	UN Office to the African Union (UNOAU)	Since January 2014	1
<b>Europe</b>			
46.	United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR)	Feb 1992–Mar 1995	1381
47.	United Nations Preventive Deployment Force (UNPREDEP)	Mar 1995–Mar 1999	04
48.	United Nations Mission of Observers in Prevlaka (UNMOP)	Feb 1996–Dec 2002	
49.	United Nations Transitional Authority in Eastern Slavonia, Baranja and Western Sirmium (UNTAES)	Jan 1996–Jan 1998	17
50.	United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK)	June 1999–June 2009	12
51.	United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG)	Aug 1993–June 2009	94
<b>America</b>			
52.	United Nations Mission in Haiti (UNMIH)	May 1995–June 1996	2023
53.	UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (NY)	–	7

Source: Authors prepared this table using the information available in the website of Bangladesh Army, Armed Forces Division of Bangladesh and the United Nations. For further consultation, one can survey these websites: <https://www.army.mil.bd/taxonomy/term/77>; [https://www.army.mil.bd/sites/default/files/Total%20BD%20Participation%20in%20UN%20Depl%20\(Comp\)\\_2.pdf](https://www.army.mil.bd/sites/default/files/Total%20BD%20Participation%20in%20UN%20Depl%20(Comp)_2.pdf) (Total BD participation in completed missions); [https://www.army.mil.bd/sites/default/files/Msn%20Wise%20Current%20UN%20Depl%20\(3-1\).pdf](https://www.army.mil.bd/sites/default/files/Msn%20Wise%20Current%20UN%20Depl%20(3-1).pdf) (mission based current deployment); and [https://www.army.mil.bd/sites/default/files/State%20of%20overseas%20Depl\\_1.pdf](https://www.army.mil.bd/sites/default/files/State%20of%20overseas%20Depl_1.pdf) (state of overseas deployment); <https://www.afd.gov.bd/index.php/un-peacekeeping/bangladesh-in-un-mission> (Armed Forces Division); and from the yearly reports available at [https://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/resources/statistics/contributors\\_archive.shtml](https://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/resources/statistics/contributors_archive.shtml), accessed 26 January 2015.