Chapter 4

Foreign Policy
In the history of Bangladesh, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the Father of the Nation, holds an incomparable place. He was the dreamer and architect of an independent Bangladesh, led the Bengali nation towards the struggle and road of self-determination, which helped the nation ultimately achieve its independence in 1971. From the inception of his leadership for independence, he reaffirmed Bangladesh’s unwavering commitment to upholding the principles of international law and working for peace, harmony and stability in the world. He set a noble vision of building Bangladesh as a responsible actor in addressing the challenges faced by the humanity. On the eve of his birth centenary, it will be prudent to revisit the foundations of Bangladesh’s foreign policy that were laid down by the Father of the Nation during his lifetime and in retrospect, to reflect on whether Bangladesh is successful in pursuing his path.

The guiding principle of Bangladesh’s foreign policy was derived from the philosophical root that was enshrined by Bangabandhu in the Constitution; as “Friendship to all and malice towards none”. But where did it stem from? We all are well acquainted with the famous delineation from Bismarck who defined foreign policy as the extension of domestic
policy. Therefore, not only international structure, but also domestic realities guided the great leader of the newly liberated nation to form the foreign policy based on peace, justice and non-alignment. The turbulent time of the Great Wars (World War I and World War II) followed by anti-colonial waves across the globe, entrenched the longing for self-determination, peace and democracy into Bangabandhu's political philosophy. He, being a true son of the soil, did not take much to ascertain that as a nation, our identity and aspiration not only derived from the colonial past, rather, it also resided within the realm of Bengali nationalism.

Bangabandhu's resolute commitment for upholding global peace based on the UN Charter was codified magnificently in the Constitution of Bangladesh, which goes like, "The State shall base its international relations on the principles of respect for national sovereignty and equality, non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries, peaceful settlement of international disputes, and respect for international law and the principles enunciated in the United Nations Charter." The aspirations behind this firm commitment were eloquently put into words by Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in his maiden address to the UN General Assembly in September 1974: "The noble ideals enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations are the very ideals for which millions of our people have made the supreme sacrifice. I know that the soul of our martyrs joins us in pledging that the Bengali nation fully commits itself to the building of a world order in which the aspiration of all men [and women] for peace and justice will be realized." Like a true statesman, Bangabandhu beautifully juxtaposed, Bengalis' nationalist aspiration for freedom with the global yearning for peace and justice in a world that was intensely polarized by the Cold War.

Based on this philosophical foundation, Bangladesh's foreign policy objectives are further elaborated in Article 25(1) of its Constitution, enunciating that the state shall maintain its foreign relations based on the principles of peaceful settlement of international disputes, respect for international law and the UN Charter, and strive for social and economic emancipation of the people. Bangabandhu, like all Great Leaders, was very
much a creation of his time and space but through his work, left undeniable mark on the history that transcends both time and national boundaries. His political and philosophical worldviews were shaped by his deep-rooted bond with his own people, era, culture, socio-political struggle, mentors and the larger society.

Therefore, Bangabandhu was very much aware of the political reality that Bangladesh was born into. Right after independence, the new nation had to navigate through treacherous, turbulent path and numerous hidden shoals created by not only a polarized sub-continent but also an ideologically divided world. The rift between the US and the USSR was so extreme that the birth of Bangladesh put the two superpowers almost on a collision course in the Bay of Bengal during the final month of the war. Considering the Cold War situation, it was not surprising that another newly independent nation, born out of anti-colonial wave, was caught between the superpower tussle for supremacy. Thus, the main challenge for Bangabandhu was to reconstruct a war-ravaged country. He took the helm in such a time when the economy was completely shattered, infrastructures and communications were completely destroyed due to the colonial like rule of Pakistan and the nine-month long War of Liberation. Under this demanding condition, he had to secure international recognition, assistance for reconstruction of the country and put Bangladesh on the world map as a self-reliant nation. In order to achieve these Herculean tasks, Bangabandhu realized the necessity of reaching out equally to both the superpowers and build practicable bridges with them. His commitment to non-alignment stemmed from the deep-rooted belief that it was not in Bangladesh’s interest to be caught in between the rival superpowers.

Bangabandhu believed in synergies of mutual cooperation and collaboration. After the independence of Bangladesh, he paid several important high-level visits to various countries with a view to strengthening relations with neighbouring and important global powers as well as light up country’s image on the global stage. Starting with the visit to the UK in January 1972 after being freed from the prison of Pakistan, Bangabandhu went to India, the US and the Soviet Union. At the invitation of the Japanese government, he visited Japan in 1973 where he was
accorded a red-carpet reception. He also went to Lahore to join the OIC Summit in 1974 and had meetings with many Arab leaders. He attended the 29th Session of the UN General Assembly and delivered his famous speech on 25 September 1974. In his speech, Bangabandhu said, "We will not move towards a world filled with hunger, poverty, unemployment, fear of starvation, fear of being completely destroyed by nuclear war; we will look to a world where humanity is capable of great success in the era of astounding advances in science and technology. This future will be free from the threat of nuclear war. By the equitable distribution of all the resources and technical knowledge of the world, the door to such welfare will be opened where every person will have the minimum guarantee of a happy and respectable life." These objectives are still integral parts of the foreign policy of Bangladesh.

Bangabandhu visualized a world where human beings would coexist irrespective of class, creed, race, religious identity and where people would come forward to help each other during their grief and sorrow. He joined the NAM in 1973. Bangabandhu in his Unfinished Memoirs mentioned, "We do not believe in the arms race. We seek the friendship of all nations in order to promote the welfare of the oppressed and exploited people everywhere... we are... following a positive, non-aligned foreign policy by keeping ourselves aloof from the military power blocs. Promotion of international peace and solidarity is not merely the policy of the government; it has been enshrined in our constitution as one of the fundamental principles of state policy." He stood against apartheid in Africa, foreign occupation in Asia and Africa or South America. He expressed his solidarity with the people of Palestine. In the same way, he condemned the overthrowing of the democratically elected government of Cyprus. As a strong preacher of non-communal politics, he was vocal against all forms of communal violence. In a message sent to the World Congress of Peace Forces, held in Moscow in October 1973, Bangabandhu said, "The oppressed people of the world must liberate themselves from exploitation, and man's injustice to man must end if the world is to enjoy a stable peace." In his statement in the fourth NAM Summit in Algiers in 1973, he clearly pronounced his preference for the downtrodden, "The
world is now divided into two camps—the oppressors and the oppressed. I am on the side of the oppressed.” As a recognition of his contribution to global peace, Bangabandhu received the Joliot-Curie Medal of Peace. In the context of increasing inequality, racial discrimination, and oppression, Bangabandhu’s visions are still relevant and guiding the foreign policy of Bangladesh.

Bangabandhu believed in international and regional cooperation on the basis of mutual trust. Immediately after independence, he actively pursued membership in important international organizations. With his relentless efforts, the country gained membership of the Commonwealth, OIC, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), the World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Labour Organization (ILO). He also placed high importance on enhanced cooperation among neighbouring countries in South Asia. In this respect, a statement of Bangabandhu which was given in Kolkata on 06 February 1972 can be mentioned,

“Let there be an end once for all, to the sterile policy of confrontation among the neighbours. Let us not fritter away our national resources but use them to lift the standard of living of our people. As for us, we will not be found wanting to cooperate with all concerned for creating an era of peace in South Asia, where we could live side by side as good neighbours and pursue constructive policies for the benefit of our people.”

Under the leadership of Bangabandhu’s daughter, Honourable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, Bangladesh is very much on the right track to be the Sonar Bangla he always dreamt, spoke of and worked for. Under her bold, visionary and charismatic leadership, the country continues to uphold Bangabandhu’s brand of foreign policy which preaches balanced relations based on mutual trust and respect with great powers and good relations with all countries in the immediate neighbourhood and beyond.

Bangladesh enjoys best of its relations with its largest neighbour India. It is the policy of friendly and good neighbourly relations that guided Bangladesh through difficult times with Myanmar. In recent years, the Rohingya influx from Myanmar into Bangladesh has created a
humanitarian crisis and soured the bilateral relations between the two nations. However, Bangladesh remained steadfast in Bangabandhu’s path of peace and continued engagements with Myanmar to solve this crisis in peaceful manner. The hope is to solve this problem once and for all with sustainable return of the Rohingyas to Myanmar as expressed by the honourable Prime Minister at the UN General Assembly.

Bangabandhu clearly understood that in a realist world that was marred by conflicts, war, and rivalry, it would be important for a country like Bangladesh not only to keep equidistance but uphold multilateralism particularly through the UN system. Hence, this remained Bangladesh’s diplomatic strength where the country engages as an active voice in various normative and policymaking initiatives. Under the pragmatic and dynamic leadership of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, Bangladesh has maintained its success in promoting international peace and security through peacekeeping and peacebuilding activities.

One key foreign policy priority of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, the able daughter of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, has been to situate Bangladesh at international setting as a responsible and responsive state. This has aptly been manifested in her Vision 2021, Vision 2041 and the forward looking “Digital Bangladesh” campaign that dreams to transform Bangladesh into a knowledge-based society. In the coming days, Bangladesh will continue to follow Bangabandhu’s footsteps in its peace-centric and sustainable development focused approach in international forum. Bangabandhu believed in the collective power of Bengali nation and humanity. Amidst this global pandemic of COVID-19, whereas worldwide many nations are struggling to keep up their economic progress, Bangladesh is performing admirably. The dreams and aspirations those were sown by Father of the Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, to turn this country into Sonar Bangla, will be achieved through the indomitable resolve and hard work by the nation under the leadership of our great leader, honourable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.
1. Introduction

Since its inception through the bloody War of Liberation in 1971, Bangladesh has been adhering to and following certain principles and norms in formulating and implementing its foreign policy objectives and goals. Scholars, diplomats, professionals, etc., have identified these principles and norms as: respect for national sovereignty and equality; non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries; peaceful settlement of international disputes; respect for international law; renunciation of the use of force in international relations; general and complete disarmament; upholding the right of every people freely to determine and build up its own social, economic and political system by ways and means of its own free choice; and providing support for oppressed people throughout the world waging a just struggle against imperialism, colonialism or racialism. These principles are in fact, constitutional obligations as they have been enumerated in Article 25 of the Constitution of Bangladesh. Moreover, some of these principles are in complete agreement with the United Nations Charter. The principles of respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence are in complete
agreement with Article 2(4) of the Charter of the UN and the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of other states are in harmony with Article 2(7) of the UN Charter.2

These principles provide the guidance and form the basic tenets for the policy makers and decision takers in formulating and devising foreign policy of Bangladesh. However, apart from all these, it is the principle or to be more appropriate, the doctrine of “friendship with all and malice towards none,” that has been the foreign policy dictum of Bangladesh, guiding and informing the policy makers since independence. Considerable research has been carried out assessing and analyzing Bangladesh’s foreign policy3 and some of them have focused on evaluating the principles of Bangladesh foreign policy. Hence, the objective of the present paper is not to analyze the principles of foreign policy of Bangladesh or make an assessment of Bangladesh’s foreign relations with regard to the country’s observance or reliance on these principles in pursuing its national interests in international interactions. Rather, the main objective of the paper is to seek and explore the sources or roots of these foreign policy principles of Bangladesh, especially, the doctrine of “friendship with all and malice towards none”. If we closely look at this foreign policy doctrine, it is clearly ostensible that all the basic principles of Bangladesh’s foreign policy, one way or the other are linked with this doctrine. For example, it can easily be argued that the principles like non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries; peaceful settlement of international disputes; respect for international law; renunciation of the use of force in international relations etc., are in fact, derivatives of the doctrine of “friendship with all and malice towards none”.

Existing research and scholarly discussions on Bangabandhu and Bangladesh foreign policy focused on the foreign policy directions and the foreign policy initiatives that were undertaken by the Father of the Nation in the aftermath of the independence of Bangladesh.4 Some other discussions highlighted about Bangabandhu’s role during the formative phase of Bangladesh’s foreign policy and identified him as the architect of foreign policy of the nascent state.5 The present research, on the contrary, is about the origin or roots of the principles of Bangladesh’s foreign policy and the role Bangabandhu played in formulating and shaping these principles, especially the dictum of “friendship to all and malice towards
It can be assumed that Bangabandhu, as the Father of the Nation and as an undisputed and "charismatic" leader, had critical sway and influence on devising and formulating the basic principles and constitutional guidelines of Bangladesh's foreign policy. It was his ideas and philosophies that had been reflected in the formulation of the guidance, and "framing" of Bangladesh's foreign policy principles. As one scholar noted, "reflection of National values is a big criterion for a foreign policy ..."

As a matter of fact, national interest is the permanent factor. Country's geographical location is also an issue of significance. Bangabandhu was very much aware of these facts. Against this backdrop, he took up formulating the foreign policy of an independent Bangladesh.”

Renowned historian Syed Anwar Husain also made similar statement, “The foreign policy that gradually took shape ... for understandable reasons, impacted heavily, by the ideas, ideals and directions given by Bangabandhu.”

Therefore, the paper intends to trace the source of foreign policy principles of Bangladesh, pondering upon, if those were originated from Bangabandhu's ideas and philosophies, especially, the doctrine of "friendship to all, and malice towards none". In doing so, the paper utilizes the "levels of analysis" approach in analyzing and explaining the leadership's role in "framing" and shaping foreign policy directions of a particular country. And in line with the "individual level of analysis" which seeks to understand what impacts a leader's choice of particular foreign policy option, the discussion in the paper also moves forward to explain the personality characteristics and longstanding political experiences that have moulded and shaped Bangabandhu's perceptions, ideas and ideals that in turn impacted his choices of foreign policy principles and doctrines.

2. Leadership Roles in “Framing” Foreign Policy: The Theoretical Underpinning

"Levels of analysis" approach is a prolific and widely used approach utilized by scholars to explain and understand foreign policy behaviour i.e., choices, decisions etc., of a country and the outcome of a particular foreign policy decision. It encompasses three levels of analysis: the
individual, the state and the international system. The "individual level of analysis" focuses on leaders and decision makers in an effort to explain foreign policy. The "state level of analysis", on the other hand, focuses on factors internal to the state as those compel states to engage in specific foreign policy behaviours and essentially, involves the institutional framework of the state, domestic constituencies, economic condition and the state's national history and culture. Finally, the "system level of analysis" focuses on comparisons and interactions between states and emphasizes on the relative power of states as states' interactions are guided by their relative capabilities, such as their power and wealth, which influence their possibilities for actions for success on the global state. However, these three levels of analysis correspond to the different foci of foreign policy analysis: individuals contemplate options and make decisions, states engage in foreign policy behaviours, and the interaction between states in the international system yields outcomes. Nevertheless, the individual or the leadership's roles remain at the centre of foreign policy decision making as the factors internal to the state and the systemic environment are functioning either as constraining or enabling the individual decision-making.

Extensive scholarly works exist on the role of leaders in formulating and shaping foreign policy of individual country. The individual level of analysis assumes that individuals shape the course of history because it is their choices and decisions that drive the course of events. It implies that individuals and the decisions they make are the major determinants of foreign policy. Thereafter, scholars are more focused on understanding what impacts a leader's decision making or choices of options i.e., how a leader evaluates different policy options, which options he would have rejected and why he chooses a particular option among other available options. Writing in early 1970s, James N Rosenau, a very renowned scholar of foreign policy analysis, mentioned about individual values, the intellectual capability of the individual and his longstanding political experiences having crucial impacts on shaping and moulding a leader's personality, hence, in turn impacting his decision making.

More recent literature, however, are focusing more on the individual personalities on one hand and perception of the leader on the other. The first focus leads to the study of personality traits, beliefs, and values as the
factors that explain foreign policy decisions. It emphasizes the enduring qualities of an individual decision maker. Insight into the personality, character, beliefs, and values of the individual enhances our ability to gauge what motivates that decision maker. The second focus leads to the study of the perceptions and how these influence foreign policy decision making. The individual’s perceptions or the process by which a person makes sense of events and situations in his or her world, are usually specific to that situation or event. Scholars of perception studies, framing, and problem representation do not negate the importance of personality, but they are more interested in how policy makers make sense of—or define—specific decision making situations. Moreover, it is argued that leaders’ personalities and perceptions interact in decision making as they jointly determine how best to define the problem before them.

So, from this theoretical vantage point, that emphasizes on leadership’s roles in determining foreign policy of a particular country and, also upholds that leaders’ personality characteristics and perceptions function as the deciding factor in individual decision making, the following discussion delves into exploring the origin of the principles of Bangladesh foreign policy and the roles of the “charismatic” leader Bangabandhu. However, the discussion is structured around the doctrine of “friendship to all and malice towards none” as this is overarching and all other principles of Bangladesh foreign policy are linked to this. The principle of non-alignment is also discussed as in spite of not being included in Article 25 directly, this has been a crucial component of Bangladesh’s foreign policy in the immediate aftermath of Independence and especially, in the Cold War environment that Bangladesh as a nascent state was confronted with.

3. The Doctrine of “Friendship to all and Malice towards None”

Historically, “friendship to all and malice towards none” has been the guiding principle and the doctrine of Bangladesh foreign policy. Scholars, policy-makers, analysts, etc., have all agreed about this doctrine. Now, this doctrine has not been enunciated in the Constitution of Bangladesh like other principles of foreign policy. Rather, it is one of those statements made by the Father of the Nation which became the overarching principle
of Bangladesh foreign policy. The most recent reference to the doctrine of “friendship to all and malice towards none” can be found in the interview of Bangabandhu in the aftermath of his returning on 10 January 1972. On 15 January 1972, there was an interview with a journalist from the AP\(^7\) in which Bangabandhu was answering the questions as extempore without any written script. Suddenly, the journalist asked him about what kind of foreign policy he will undertake and, Bangabandhu without hesitation mentioned five principles of foreign policy in chronological order. Those were: non-alignment; neutrality; independent; peaceful coexistence; and “friendship to all and malice towards no one”.

However, these principles were not completely new at the time as they had already been adopted as the guiding principles of Bangladesh foreign policy by the Provisional Government during the War of Liberation and of course under the directions and guidance of Bangabandhu. As narrated by Tanveer Ahmed in his book\(^8\), after the formation of the Provisional Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh on 17 April 1971, the government in-exile with instruction from Bangabandhu prepared a “foreign policy guidelines” to be pursued by Bangladeshi diplomats and foreign office officials. In fact, the government in-exile prepared a 16-Point guideline for the Bengali foreign ministry officials of Pakistan who were posted in various foreign missions and deflected pledging their allegiance to Bangladesh. A circular was issued listing all the deflected officials of the ministry of foreign affairs and were instructed to strictly follow the guideline. As Tanveer Ahmed narrated, the foremost principle of this guideline was: “friendship to all and malice towards none”. Other principles included: belief in dissolution of political oppression, economic exploitation and cultural aggression; non-alignment, peaceful co-existence and anti-imperialism; opposition to all military alliances that impede global peace such as CENTO and SEATO, etc.\(^9\) Moreover, the government in-exile in a communication to the Government of India had stated that with regard to foreign relations they would follow a policy of non-alignment, peaceful co-existence and opposition to colonialism, racialism and imperialism in all its manifestations. Indira Gandhi while making a statement to the Indian Parliament on 06 December 1971, on India’s decision to recognize Bangladesh, cited the above communication of the Bangladesh government as principles of Bangladesh foreign policy.\(^{20}\)
Another reference is found that was before the 1970 general elections, when the Father of the Nation was delivering a radio address on 28 October in 1970. In that address, he mentioned,

"Our opinion about an important issue like foreign policy is that the fight for power all over the world is going on and in no way we can involve ourselves in this fight. For this reason we have to follow a free and fair foreign policy of non-alignment."

In the past, we demanded to have moved aside from a SEATO-CENTO and other military pacts. We have decided not to associate with any such pact in future on the basis of our declared decisions. The struggle of the suppressed and oppressed people all over the world is continuing against imperialism, colonialism and apartheid and we have supported this struggle.

"No hostility towards anybody, friendship with all"—this is the principle based on which we believe in peaceful co-existence with all the state of the world, particularly with our neighbouring ones."

Therefore, Bangabandhu was very clear about the foreign policy direction of Bangladesh, that is to follow a free and fair foreign policy of non-alignment and "friendship to all and malice towards none". He said that Bangladesh has decided not to associate with any such pact in future and of course will struggle in favour of the suppressed and oppressed against the oppressor. And then at the end he mentioned that no hostility towards anybody, friendship with all. This was the principle based on which Bangladesh believed in peaceful coexistence with all the states of the world, particularly with its neighbouring ones.

In fact, the doctrine of "friendship to all and malice towards none" was included in the election Manifesto of Awami League in 1970. Under the heading of "Foreign Policy" and the sub-heading of "Peaceful Co-Existence" it was noted that:

"In keeping with the basic principles of "friendship to all and malice towards none," we wish to live in peaceful co-existence with all countries, including our neighbours, on the basis of justice and mutual respect for each other's security. Consistently, with this aim we shall not and cannot afford to be drawn into global power conflicts, which are raging in the world today."
An earlier reference of this doctrine is also found in the memoirs of former foreign secretary of the government of Bangladesh, Fakhruddin Ahmed, who noted that, H S Suhrawardy, when he was the Prime Minister of Pakistan also mentioned about this. Suhrawardy was a staunch pro-western but at the same time he worked for improving Pakistan-China relations. And to emphasize that Pakistan should have relationships with both the USA and China during that time, he mentioned this as a passing remark. However, it was the Father of the Nation, Bangabandhu, who saw Suhrawardy as a great leader, picked up this remark, perceived the value of this for a country like Bangladesh and, incorporated this as the overarching doctrine of Bangladesh foreign policy.

Now at the global level, the closest affinity of this statement “friendship to all, and malice towards none” can be found around hundred years back in a speech of the American President Abraham Lincoln, when he was elected for the second term. At the end of his inaugural speech on 04 March 1965, he said “with malice towards none and with charity for all”. Now, there is a linkage between Lincoln’s statement and Bangabandhu’s foreign policy doctrine. In the famous interview with David Frost on 18 January 1972, when Bangabandhu was asked by Frost, whom he (Bangabandhu) admires most as great leaders, Bangabandhu mentioned: Mao Tse-tung, Abraham Lincoln and Nelson Mandela among the world leaders he admires most. So, perhaps in the back of his mind Bangabandhu had the rhythm of Abraham Lincoln, and then he came up with his own formulation and devised the doctrine of “friendship to all and malice towards none”.

4. The Policy of Non-Alignment

While focusing on another principle which is the policy of non-alignment, it can be said that the choice of this policy was necessary and it actually supported and benefitted Bangladesh in the post-Liberation War period. But the choice of this policy was not a post-war phenomenon. As already mentioned earlier, this policy option was also included in the 16-point “foreign policy guideline” of the government in-exile during the War of Liberation. If we go back further, the policy of non-alignment was also included in the 1970 Election Manifesto of Awami League under the heading of “Foreign Policy” and the sub-heading of “Independent, Non-aligned Foreign Policy”. It was noted that—
“Having regard to the aspirations of our people and the basic interests of our State, we stand committed to an independent, non-aligned foreign policy.”

It is to be noted that an independent, non-aligned foreign policy has always been a choice of Awami League since Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib assumed the leadership of the party as General Secretary in 1953. In an interview in 1999, former foreign minister and the Chairman of the Drafting Committee of Bangladesh Constitution, Kamal Hossain mentioned, “Awami League’s long-standing demand was to formulate a non-aligned foreign policy”.

In fact, following Pakistan’s joining of the SEATO and the Baghdad Pact, Awami League as a major opposition party had exhibited staunch support for non-aligned foreign policy as a protest against Muslim League’s pro-western policy. And it was Bangabandhu who was a strong supporter of non-alignment and anti-imperialism. Even before the non-alignment movement formally commenced in 1961, following the Bandung Conference in April 1955, Bangabandhu showed clear inclination for non-alignment in foreign policy and anti-imperial position. An important evidence supporting such earlier position of Bangabandhu can be found from his initiative in the National Legislative Assembly in 1955, in which he was a member. On 31 August 1955, while the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan session was going on, Bangabandhu right at the beginning, raised a point of privilege, asking the speaker to move a resolution condemning the action of the French government as they have killed innocent people of Algeria and Morocco.

To quote Bangabandhu’s exact word,

“Sir, I want to draw your attention on a point of privilege. You know Sir, that Musalmans, the people of Morocco and Algeria have been massacred by the French Imperialists. I feel that we must and, I think, the Speaker himself should move a resolution condemning the action of the French Imperialist as they have massacred and killed the innocent people of Algeria and Morocco who are fighting for the independence of their country.”

He suggested that such resolution should be sent to the French government and also to the bereaved families of those who died in the killings. He also suggested taking initiative at the United Nations against
killings of people worldwide who are fighting for their independence. He also suggested to observe one minute’s silence for the peace of their souls, who have laid down their lives for the independence of their country. Therefore, it is very clear that Bangabandhu had a very strong position against imperial countries and imperialism hence, in turn a staunch supporter of non-aligned foreign policy.

Bangabandhu’s preference for anti-imperial policy and non-alignment also emanated from his earlier visit to China. Bangabandhu visited China for the first time in 1952 as a member of a delegation, to attend the Peace Conference of the Asian and Pacific Regions. As he mentioned in his book, he was very much surprised by witnessing the development of China. And he commented that the people of China are now free from oppression. In his book, he also mentioned that during this visit, he developed strong opinion against western imperialism. And following the visit, he became a strong supporter of non-alignment principle in foreign policy. Apart from this, as suggested by the scholars of “individual level of analysis” of foreign policy, Bangabandhu’s characters, beliefs, values and his perceptions developed over the years due to his childhood experience, upbringing, family background and long political experiences have shaped and moulded his ideals that have impacted his foreign policy choices. This argument requires further elaboration.

5. Factors Shaping Bangabandhu’s Beliefs, Values and Perceptions

Bangabandhu’s childhood, his family life, education, socio-economic and political surroundings, and above all, his long political career—all have critical impacts in the development of his ideas and ideals. As a veteran Bangladeshi diplomat remarked, “Bangabandhu like any other individual was a product of his time and space and his political worldviews were shaped by his associations with his own family, community, mentors and the larger society that he was born into.”

Sheikh Mujib was born in a well-off middle-class family in 1920. He was the third among four daughters and two sons of Sheikh Lutfar Rahman and Sayera Khatun. However, he was the most loved one. His grandmother was very fond of him and took extra care of him. He was also loved and
cared by his parents. As a result, he grew up as a loving, compassionate human being with middle-class family values as well as strains and stresses. Economically, as mentioned by Bangabandhu in his memoirs that the ancestors of Sheikh Family were rich landlords but over time their richness declined and by the time of Bangabandhu’s generation, the family became a “middle-class family” with enough to feed but not much for luxury. This middle-class socio-economic surroundings made him a modest, frugal and prudent human being which in turn also shaped his ideas and values.

Bangabandhu had an interrupted schooling due to his sickness. However, after a couple of years break he rejoined study and after finishing school, went to Islamia College in Kolkata to study. After graduation from Islamia College, he got admitted in the Law department of Dhaka University in 1948. He could not finish his law degree, since from 1948 he became intensely involved in politics. However, Bangabandhu’s education, in addition to his family background and surroundings, had also shaped his ideas, philosophies and his perceptions.

But apart from his education, socio-economic surroundings, childhood and family life, it was his long political experiences that impacted him the most. Bangabandhu’s longstanding political experiences encompass basically his intellectual and extra-ordinary political journey from a youthful activist to the leader of a struggle for national liberation and dreamer of an independent Bangladesh. And this all started at the very cusp of his adolescence and adulthood. When he was a higher secondary student, he raised voices for the benefit of his fellow students in front of the then Chief Minister of Bengal HS Suhrawardy. Later he also participated in helping people and pacifying the violence during the communal riots preceding the Partition of British India in 1947.

Bangabandhu had long elaborate political experiences of struggle. Beginning with the Language Movement in 1948, he spearheaded the autonomy movement for the Bengali people in 1950s and 1960s and presented the Six-Point programme, a well thought-out plan to ensure autonomy. He had all the faith in the constitutional process and participated in all the elections held in Pakistan and in the government processes when needed. He saw the elections of 1970 as an opportunity to achieve the dream of his Bengalee brethren for emancipation, peace and justice. It was
only when that hope is shattered in early March of 1971, he made that impeccable declaration “the struggle for this time, is the struggle for liberation” and commenced the non-cooperation movement till the deadly night of 25 March 1971.

Bangabandhu had great admiration for other great leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Abraham Lincoln and Nelson Mandela as mentioned earlier. It was his affinity and affection for Gandhi that made him a strong supporter of non-violence and cooperation. His preference for non-cooperation movement can be traced back to Gandhi, when Bangabandhu actually met Gandhi in 1946 during the communal riots. As narrated by A Gaffar Chowdhury, Gandhi was fasting to protest the communal riots in his Beleghata asylum in West Bengal. H S Suhrawardy, the then Chief Minister of Bengal went to Gandhi’s asylum to request him breaking the fasting. Bangabandhu accompanied Suhrawardy and when Gandhi was to given the juice to break fasting, Suhrawardy invited Bangabandhu to do the honour and Bangabandhu handed over the glass to Gandhi. These are small incidents, but for a young political activist at the moment this would definitely had indelible effects on Bangabandhu.

However, the most important aspect of his political experience that had permanent imprint on his personality and perception and, made him a modest, accommodative and prone to cooperation leader was his experiences of imprisonment. From 1947 to 1971, Bangabandhu was arrested 22 times and he spent altogether 13 valuable years of his life in jail. But he was persistent and withstood this repression by the Pakistani ruling elite. And the most significant aspect is that in spite of this horrible experience of imprisonment, he had not lost his way. He remained accommodative and continued to believe in peaceful co-existence. As we can see, whenever he came out of jail he recommenced his political drive to achieve equal rights and autonomy for his people especially through negotiation and discussion while not shying away to use protest and pressure.

To summarize, it is evident that Bangabandhu had a normal life born out of his middle-class family environment. The love and affection he received in his childhood and the affectionate upbringing made him the great leader with unmatched love and affection for his people. To quote Bangabandhu himself,
"As a man, what concerns mankind concerns me, As a Bengalee, I am deeply involved in all that concerns Bengalees. This abiding involvement is born of and nourished by love, enduring love, which gives meaning to my politics and to my very being."^{37}

This unfathomable love for his people made him more compassionate, modest and accommodative as well as peace loving. And these kind of personality and values also impacted his foreign policy choices of peaceful co-existence, cooperation and "friendship to all, and malice towards none".

6. Conclusion

The principles of Bangladesh's foreign policy are enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic and since independence the country has been adhering to these principles and norms. Moreover, the country has also been observing "friendship to all and malice towards none" in achieving its foreign policy goals that has become the foreign policy doctrine over the years. Discussion in the paper has provided evidences to exhibit the fact that articulation of this doctrine is a pre-independence phenomenon. And the origin of this articulation can be traced back to the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Basically, it was the reflection of his ideas, values and perceptions; and the most important thing is that those are original to the Father of the Nation; it is not that he has borrowed them from elsewhere.

From a theoretical point of view, the "individual level of analysis" of foreign policy decision making basically reinforces the idea that the roots of Bangladesh's foreign policy are the ideas, values and the perceptions of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Same is applicable for the principle of "non-alignment" which may lose its appeal in the post-Cold War period but was a key component of foreign policy in the formative years of Bangladesh.

Hence, Bangabandhu is the leader who changed the course of history, founded the independent state of Bangladesh, and shaped and framed the foreign policy of the nascent state. It was his personalities, characteristics, beliefs and perceptions born out of his childhood experiences, family environment, education, socio-economic surrounding and longstanding political experiences that in turn impact and determine his choices of foreign policy principles and options.
Article 25 of the Constitution under the title “Promotion of International Peace, Security and Solidarity” states that

“The State shall base its international relations on the principles of respect for national sovereignty and equality, non interference in the internal affairs of other countries, peaceful settlement of international disputes, and respect for international law and the principles enunciated in the United Nations Charter, and on the basis of those principles shall –

strive for the renunciation of the use of force in international relations and for general and complete disarmament;

uphold the right of every people freely to determine and build up its own social, economic and political system by ways and means of its own free choice; and

support oppressed peoples throughout the world waging a just struggle against imperialism, colonialism or racialism.


Monayem Sarker, op. cit., p. 402.


Hudson and others made an excellent use of this ‘state level of analysis’ in the book, Valerie M Hudson (ed.), *Culture and Foreign Policy*, Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1997.


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As noted by Syed Anwar Husain, another such statement made by the Father of the Nation was making Bangladesh “the Switzerland of South Asia”. According to him, this was a short but loaded statement that provided the perceptual basis of Bangladesh foreign policy. See Syed Anwar Husain, “Architect of formative phase of Bangladesh foreign policy”, op. cit.

The 3:13 minutes video of the interview can be found in the online AP archive available at http://www.aparchive.com/metadata/youtube/118ace6761e167e8f6d30095aa9533a, accessed 02 March 2021.


For detail discussion of the 16 points of the circular, see ibid., pp. 20-22.


F Video of the interview is available online at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gHxL6hhY4fc&t=45s, accessed on 02 March 2021.


Quoted in Monayem Sarker, op. cit., p. 404.


Tariq Karim, op. cit.


Ibid., pp. 2-4.


Ibid., p. 13.


Balancing Divergent Global Powers: Reflections on Bangabandhu’s Foreign Policy

\textit{A S M Ali Ashraf}

1. Introduction

Conventional wisdom suggests that newly independent countries succumb to the wishes of the regional and global hegemons due to their weak military capability and economic dependence. This paper challenges the conventional wisdom. It argues that transformational leadership in a newly independent country can contribute to the adoption of a pragmatic foreign policy of balancing divergent powers rather than succumbing to their wishes. This argument is empirically tested by drawing evidence from the foreign policy of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

Bangabandhu was the undisputed leader of the Independence Movement of Bangladesh and the architect of Bangladesh foreign policy. During a short span of nearly four years at the helm of Bangladesh Government (12 January 1972-15 August 1975), he made a series of foreign and security policy decisions including those related to membership in the Organisation of Islamic Countries (OIC) and the United Nations (UN), and dealing with the Cold War bloc politics.\textsuperscript{1} Yet, there is a dearth of literature exploring how his government articulated Bangladesh foreign policy and what role he played as the highest diplomat in managing various global powers. Against this
backdrop, this paper asks two central questions: First, how did Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman prioritize Bangladesh’s foreign policy during the post-independence years? And second, how did he lead the foreign policy decision making process balancing the divergent global powers?

2. Why Bangabandhu's Foreign Policy?

At a time when the golden jubilee of Bangladesh coincides with the birth centenary of Bangabandhu, these questions regarding the foreign policy of the architect of Bangladesh are important and interesting for a number of reasons. First, the topic allows us to revisit the concept of balancing, which often carries an offensive connotation in world politics. In the context of great powers and regional hegemons, balancing involves a strategy of containing a rival power. This is usually done through augmenting the national power of a state or through forming military alliances and coalitions against a potential or real adversary. For the purpose of this paper, and looking from the context of a developing state in the Global South, the term balancing has a defensive connotation. It refers to maintaining sovereignty through territorial integrity and exercising a greater degree of autonomy in foreign and security policy decision-making process.

Second, an effort to seek answer to these questions sheds light on the multiple meanings of the term “divergent powers”. In the field of International Relations (IR), power is defined as the ability to influence others. Prominent IR scholar Joseph Nye offers a three-fold concept of power: hard power, soft power, and smart power. The first refers to coercion, the second persuasion, and the third a combination of two. Others look at the geographical, tangible, and intangible sources of power. The geographical elements of power include topography, size, and location of a state; tangible elements include natural resources, industrial base, and composition of a state’s armed forces. The third, intangible sources of national power include leadership quality and attributes of the population.

Realists focus on the economic and military capabilities, and suggest a typology of superpowers, great powers, and civilian powers. During the Bangladesh War of Independence, both the United States (US) and the Soviet Union were superpowers with unparalleled economic and military capabilities. In addition to these two superpowers, the other three permanent members of the UN Security Council (P5) including China, France, and the United Kingdom (UK) were, and have been, great powers.
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Third and quite interestingly, the questions necessitate moving beyond a realist definition of material power and the search for an ideational definition of power. Two types of state identities are pertinent here. One, the identity of the oil-rich Gulf countries; and two, the identity of the newly independent countries in Africa and Asia. For the first group, the global oil shocks of 1970s made the oil-rich Persian Gulf countries a source of foreign aid for many countries and thus a new centre of economic power, especially for Bangladesh which was just born as an independent country.

As for the second group and from an ideological point of view, the world was then divided into two rival blocs—a Soviet bloc of communist states and a US bloc of capitalist states. A new bloc of newly independent countries, widely known as Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), emerged with members drawn from Africa, Asia, and central Europe. Since its inception, NAM has remained a hybrid platform lacking any materialist power, and propagating an equitable and just international order. Bangladesh’s largest neighbour India, with which it shares more than 4,000 km land border, was not only a founding member of NAM, but also the most important ally during Bangladesh’s 1971 Liberation War.

In light of the above discussion, this paper examines how the newly independent Bangladesh, and its undisputed leader, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, adopted a balanced approach to mapping these divergent concepts and centres of powers. In doing so, it also examines how Bangabandhu pursued a course of action that maximized the national interests and minimized the costs.

3. Theory and Method

Foreign Policy Analysis constitutes a distinct area of professional interest within the broader field of IR. Since the 1960s, the foreign policy literature has benefited from a rich variety of theory-driven empirical studies. Snyder et al. first argued in favour of studying foreign policy from a decision-making perspective. The key argument of this school of thought is clear: foreign policy of a state reflects choices made by governing elites, their perceptions of the external world and the domestic political environment in which they operate. Aron added the geographic, demographic and ideological variables to the study of foreign policy. Comparative foreign policy literature has also explored the strategies
pursued by newly independent countries to secure diplomatic recognition
and to maintain neutrality in world affairs.\textsuperscript{12}

The neo-realist and classical realist scholars differ on the source of
foreign policy behaviour of states. Taking a neo-realist stance, Kenneth
Waltz and Stephen Walt argue that international systemic influences play
a prominent role in structuring the foreign policy preferences of states.\textsuperscript{13}
Classical realists including E H Carr and Hans Morgenthau challenge this
view and insist on the primacy of domestic factors such as historical
learning, interest groups, political parties, and public opinion.\textsuperscript{14}

Neoclassical realism takes a middle ground arguing that neither
external factors nor domestic politics alone can determine the foreign
policy of a state. Prominent neoclassical realists including Fareed Zakaria
and William Wohlforth argue that external incentive and pressures are
channelled through domestic level variables to shape the foreign policy
decisions of a state.\textsuperscript{15} This paper employs the neoclassical realist theory of
IR to study Bangabandhu’s foreign policy from 1972 to 1975.

I argue that neoclassical realism offers a better and comprehensive
framework for analyzing foreign policy and hence it is more suitable for
addressing the broader questions of how Bangabandhu prioritized
Bangladesh foreign policy, and how he led the decision-making process in
the formative years of Bangladesh.\textsuperscript{16} Much has been written about the
emergence of Bangabandhu as the undisputed leader of Bengal (former
East Pakistan), and his ability to direct people’s aspirations toward the
1971 Independence War.\textsuperscript{17} This paper contributes to the literature on South
Asian affairs and Bangladesh politics by exploring how transformational
leadership as a domestic-level variable played a catalyst role in shaping
Bangladesh foreign policy.\textsuperscript{18}

Following the dictum of neoclassical realism, two types of external
factors are considered here: incentives and pressures. For Bangladesh
during the Mujib regime, external incentives came primarily from the
wartime and post-war support of the Indo-Soviet alliance, whereas the
main pressures came from Pakistan’s wartime alliance with the US, and its
propaganda machine that put a stumbling block to mending relations with
Saudi Arabia and the Muslim World, and Pakistan’s playing of the China
card to delay Bangladesh’s entry into the UN as a member state.
Domestic factors are measured by looking at four indictors: national interests, transformational leadership, elite cohesion and public opinion. A major plunk of Bangladesh’s national interest is to develop friendship with all and enmity with none. This has been codified in the Bangladesh Constitution. A second major domestic factor is transformational leadership as opposed to transactional leadership. The former tends to be visionary and skilful in making rational choices through a calculation of costs and benefits in dealing with long-term challenges. In contrast, transactional leaders tend to follow the usual practice and do not strive for big change. In the foreign policy decision-making process, transformational leaders adopt pragmatism in priority setting, search for dignified solution in external affairs, and make prompt decisions in dealing with matters of urgency. Elite cohesion refers to greater degree of homogeneity among the civilian and military bureaucracy. Fragmented elites can make the policy process complicated by presenting competing choices, while a cohesive elite would support the national leadership in pursuing certain foreign policy choices. For realist scholars, foreign policy decisions are made by the elites, who care less about consulting public opinion. However, the mass people’s aspirations provide a broader strategic framework guiding the foreign policy direction of a state. In the context of Bangladesh, since the large majority of people are Muslims, the search for and the maintenance of warm relations with the Muslim World played an important role in shaping the contours of Bangladesh foreign policy.

The paper employs a qualitative case study method and relies on interpretive analysis. The primary sources of information are memoirs and speeches of foreign policy practitioners. A total of 15 interviews were conducted with senior foreign policy practitioners including retired and serving officials of the Bangladesh Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) and scholars of IR and Political Science.

4. Existing Studies and Their Limits
There is a rich body of literature on Bangladesh foreign policy and the legacy of Bangabandhu. Three streams of literature can be identified focusing on memoir, historical analysis and political analysis. In the first stream, Bangabandhu’s autobiography, Unfinished Memoirs, provides a rich source of information for understanding his political career and the
struggle for independence of Bangladesh from Pakistani colonial rule. It was the time his world view was formed but the Memoirs provides no major account of Bangabandhu’s foreign policy directions. Rather, the foreign policy practitioners of Bangabandhu’s time—Kamal Hossain, S. A. Karim, and Waliur Rahman have written extensively, and their writings provide a nuanced analysis of the foreign policy aspirations of Bangladesh. The second stream of literature focusing on the historical analysis sheds lights on how Bangabandhu managed bilateral, regional, and multilateral relations and how he thought about developing relations with small and large as well as civilian and military powers. Thirdly, the political analyses of Bangladesh foreign policy adopt a regime-centric approach to evaluate the ideals and realities in Bangladesh. Some of these studies are very critical and argue that during his lifetime Bangabandhu was taking a pro-India position and remained insensitive to the larger public. Others, including foreign scholars such as Lawrence Ziring and Archer Blood term Bangladesh to be a romantic nation and Bangabandhu to be a charismatic leader.

These three streams of literature provide a rich volume of data regarding the foreign policy legacy of Bangabandhu. Yet, there is a thin body of theory-driven and policy specific literature on Bangladesh foreign policy, especially covering the first regime of the post-independence period. This paper addresses the research gap in two steps: first by mapping the major foreign policy decisions of Bangabandhu and second by examining the relevance of neoclassical realism in the analysis of his foreign policy.

5. Major Foreign Policy Decisions

This paper analyses five major foreign policy decisions taken by Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman during the years 1972-1975. These include: membership into the UN system; reaching out to the Muslim world; navigating the Cold War; building a non-aligned identity; and aspirations for Third World leadership.

First and foremost, UN membership was a key priority for the newly independent Bangladesh. Since then successive governments in Bangladesh have prioritized playing an active role at the UN and its affiliated specialized agencies. But the road to the UN was not quite
smooth, and Bangladesh made strategic decisions to become a member of the UN system. In fact, long before Bangladesh secured the UN membership status, it became a member of the World Health Organization (19 May 1972) and the International Labour Organization (22 June 1972), got financial support of US$18.5 million from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and became a member of the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (27 October 1972) and Food and Agriculture Organization (12 November 1972).

Bangladesh’s membership into the UN specialized agencies clearly indicated a multilateralist foreign policy orientation of the new State. It also depicted the capability of the diplomatic corps, which worked very hard to make sure that Bangabandhu’s foreign policy priorities were well executed. The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugee (UNHCR) also assumed a huge responsibility of simultaneously repatriating stranded Bangladeshis from Pakistan and stranded Pakistanis from Bangladesh. By July 1974, the UNHCR facilitated the repatriation of 230,439 persons, including 121,695 Bangladeshis and 108,744 Pakistanis. By the time Bangladesh became a member of the UN on 17 September 1974, it was almost inevitable that the country was a de-facto member of the UN. Only the de-jure recognition was needed, which was secured with the removal of the only major barrier erected by Chinese diplomatic opposition, backed by Pakistan, from which Bangladesh won independence after a nine-month war of cessation.

A second major decision, linked to the first one, involved reaching out to the Muslim World and entry into the Organisation for Islamic Conference (OIC). Since its inception, the OIC emerged as a forum for collective action based on the Islamic identity of member states. The reasons for reaching out to oil-rich Gulf nations and the OIC were obvious. As a war ravaged country, Bangladesh desperately needed the foreign aid for post-war reconstruction. The petrodollars of the Gulf nations were a potentially secure source of that aid. On the other hand, the ice between Pakistan and Bangladesh could only thaw with mutual recognition, which coincided with Bangladesh’s membership into the OIC in February 1974 at the Lahore Summit.

After the 1973 oil shock and the global oil price hike, Bangladesh desperately needed to cultivate warm relations with the Gulf countries to
secure a preferential oil price. The way Bangabandhu’s diplomats reached out to the powerful countries in the Middle East was extraordinary. Diplomatic relations with Saudi Arabia, the leader of the Muslim *Ummah*, was a top priority, and Bangabandhu himself met with King Faisal in 1973 at the NAM Summit in Algeria. He also dispatched his Foreign Minister Kamal Hossain to Saudi Arabia in May 1975 to meet the royal officials to make sure that Bangladesh gets diplomatic recognition from Saudi Arabia. Although Egypt gave diplomatic recognition much later in 1974, it was one of the two Middle Eastern countries other than Iraq that voted for Bangladesh’s entry to the WHO in 1972.

When the 1973 Arab-Israel war began, Bangabandhu made a prompt decision to dispatch a small team of Bangladesh Army medical team to provide medical support to the Arab brothers. It was a signal that Bangladesh was there to help the Muslim countries. This good will gesture paid back. Eventually, it was the Egyptian permanent representative to the UN who brokered with the Chinese delegate to make sure that China’s ultimate blockade was removed from Bangladesh’s entry to the UN in 1974. So, the diplomatic relations with Egypt were nurtured as a long-term strategic goal to make sure that these countries become supportive to Bangladesh’s aspiration to become a UN member. A few countries, with predominantly Muslim population, gave Bangladesh diplomatic recognition in 1972 (Indonesia and Malaysia), and later (Pakistan and Turkey), but the chronology of diplomatic recognition indicates that there was a variation in the attitudes among the Muslim countries’ towards the recognition of Bangladesh.

A third major foreign policy decision of Bangabandhu was to smoothly navigate through the Cold War bloc politics. As discussed before, Cold War was a geopolitical competition between the two superpowers; it was also an ideological confrontation between American democracy and the Soviet brand of communism. So, finding a middle path emerged as a top priority for Bangladesh in order to avoid being branded either as a member of the American bloc or the Soviet bloc. Looking at the diplomatic recognitions that Bangladesh secured, it prioritized not only cementing its relations with the Soviet Union which provided crucial support in the Liberation War, but also the other three great powers and the members of the P5. Among the P5 countries, four recognized Bangladesh in 1972:
Soviet Union on 25 January; UK on 4 February; France on 14 February; and US on 4 April. It was China that kept Bangladesh waiting for quite some time. Consistent with its anti-Indian and pro-Pakistan geopolitical stance, China recognized Bangladesh on 31 August 1975, two weeks after Bangabandhu was assassinated by a section of disgruntled military officers.

Fourth, Bangabandhu also prioritized building a non-aligned identity. This was quite evident from his visible presence at NAM summits. At the NAM Algiers Summit in 1973, he adopted an idealist position that caught the attention of many. Bangabandhu noted: “The world is now divided into two parts—repressors and the oppressed. I am on the side of the repressed masses.” For critics Bangabandhu’s reference to the “the oppressed”, which literally means the *sarbahara* in Bengali, belies the fact that his government adopted a heavy handed approach to Siraj Sikder and his revolutionary leftist party. Others including those from Bangabandhu’s Awami League party see the actions against Sikder and the revolutionary armed leftists as proportionate use of force against terrorists and anti-state elements. But Bangabandhu’s position at the 1973 NAM Summit was more about the high politics of international affairs rather than the low politics in domestic affairs. His reference to, and support for the oppressed, was about the emancipation of people in colonial societies who were fighting for independence.

Finally, the foreign policy of Bangladesh, under Bangabandhu’s leadership also searched for a Third World leadership position. A content analysis of his UN speech on 25 September 1974 articulated this leadership aspiration. The speech highlighted freedom and dignity, struggle for peace and justice, fight against global inequality, peaceful co-existence of rival nations, and UN’s role in promoting people’s progress. Bangabandhu’s UN speech, delivered in Bangla, not only reflected the perspective of a newly independent Member-State but also marked a visible presence in the comity of nations.

6. Relevance of Neoclassical Realism

How relevant is the theory of neoclassical realism in analyzing the foreign policy of Bangabandhu? In addressing this question, we first need to look at the external incentives and pressures. First, there was wartime support of the Indo-Soviet alliance, which was clearly visible. India not only
provided shelters to hundreds and thousands of Bangladeshi refugees but also provided training to the Bangladeshi freedom fighters.\textsuperscript{39} Despite the ensuing divergence between Bangladesh and India over a number of issues including land and maritime boundary delimitation and water sharing of international rivers, India remained largely supportive of the secular orientation of Bangabandhu’s policy. The signing of the 1972 India-Bangladesh Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Peace and the 1974 Agreement Concerning the Demarcation of the Land Boundary between India and Bangladesh and Related Matters (widely known as the Indira-Mujib Land Boundary Agreement) are useful evidence.

Under the terms of the Indo-Soviet Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation signed in August 1971, the Soviet Union offered to support India in the event of a direct confrontation with China and the US. When the US deployed its nuclear-armed aircraft carrier USS Enterprise in the Bay of Bengal, the Soviet Union also dispatched nuclear-armed ships in the Indian Ocean to restore the balance in favour of Bangladesh and India.\textsuperscript{40} Despite the official stance of the US Government in favour of West Pakistan, the American people, senators, and the Bangladeshi diasporas around the world were also providing external incentives to make sure that Bangladesh pursues very well-thought-out, dignified foreign policy priorities.

Secondly, foreign policy decisions were made not only in response to incentives but also in response to pressures, and there were intensive pressures, primarily coming from the Pakistan-US alliance. There was Pakistan’s propaganda that a Muslim country was divided and secularism in Bangladesh was a reflection of the latter’s “lesser Muslim” identity. Such propaganda disrupted the prospect of Bangladesh securing diplomatic recognition from the Muslim Majority nations of the Middle East.

A key question is how these external incentives and pressures were channelled through the domestic political processes to shape the foreign policy of Bangabandhu?

Four domestic factors are worth noting here: national interest, leadership and strategy, elite cohesion and public opinion.\textsuperscript{41} In assessing the calculation of national interest, one would need to revisit some of the decisions made by Bangabandhu. For instance, after his release from the Pakistani prison in January 1972, Bangabandhu made the first trip to
London and not to Delhi, which raised some questions amongst the critics. Why? Looking at the memoirs of foreign policy practitioners, one would find a clear-cut answer: it was in the national interest of the newly independent country for its leader to visit London to secure the diplomatic recognition of the British Commonwealth member-states. The calculation of national interest also played a role in Bangabandhu’s decision to extend direct support for the Arab nations in the Arab-Israel war. Bangabandhu not only dispatched an army medical team but also provided tea which was in abundant production in Bangladesh to make sure that the Arab soldiers were warm enough to fight the enemy. With the benefit of hindsight, one can find that the Egyptian support was crucial for Bangladesh to get to the UN at a time when China linked Bangladesh’s UN membership with normalization of Bangladesh-Pakistan relations and suggested deferring the UN membership issue for a couple of months. At the beginning of June 1974, the Egyptian diplomat at the UN effectively intervened by offering, what S A Karim, describes a “face-saving formula” in which China agreed to defer the issue of Bangladesh’s admission to the UN Security Council for “10 days” rather than “a couple of months.”

Other than China’s pro-Pakistan diplomacy and the Egyptian support for Bangladesh, the Bangladeshi diplomats wanted to ensure the support of all the UN Security Council members. It was identified that one of the UN Security Council members was Mauritania, with whom Bangladesh had no relations. So, Bangabandhu took the opportune moment to get on board the visiting Senegalese President Leopold Senghor to secure Mauritanian support. At the instruction of Senghor, the Senegalese Prime Minister in Dakar persuaded the Mauritanian President Moktar Daddar to support Bangladesh’s bid to the UN membership. The Senegalese intervention worked pretty well. Karim notes that it was in this context of an intensive diplomatic drama, on 10 June 1974 the UN Security Council unanimously recommended to the General Assembly the admission of Bangladesh to the United Nations.

Although the US President Richard Nixon opposed the partition of its Asian ally Pakistan, after independence, Bangabandhu decided to make an unofficial visit to Washington. It was primarily meant to dispel the myth that Bangladesh was sliding into the Indo-Soviet axis. It was more about balancing the relations with great powers. Bangabandhu’s left-leaning
finance minister Tajuddin Ahmed was sceptical about the role of the World Bank. But during his October 1974 visit, he met Robert McNamara, the World Bank President, in the context of harsh economic realities. As Bangladesh was reeling from a famine and oil price was skyrocketing, it was in the best interest of Bangladesh to pursue a policy of multilateral engagement with international financial institutions since a policy of isolationism would be too costly for the new State. 48

Transformational leaders care about uplifting the status of a nation. 49 Bangabandhu was no exception. During his UN speech in 1974, he cautiously talked about freedom and dignity. In the foreign policy domain, dignity for a newly independent country is not about succumbing to the choices of the great powers and development partners; but about assessing the cost and benefit of the foreign policy choices, making the right choice and waiting for the right moment. On several occasions, such attributes of a transformational leadership shaped the direction of Bangladesh foreign policy during the regime of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Take for example, a response to the Saudi King regarding Bangladesh’s stance on secularism as one of the four founding principles enshrined the Constitution.

During a meeting at the 1973 NAM Summit in Algiers, King Feisal suggested that “he wanted to help Bangladesh materially ... if Bangladesh were to review the provisions in its Constitution regarding secularism.” 50 Bangabandhu’s response was firm and prompt. He stressed that the Bangladeshi brand of secularism symbolized religious tolerance and a guard against political abuse of religion. He also affirmed that Saudi material support to Bangladesh would be welcome but not be tagged with constitutional amendment, which was an internal affair of Bangladesh. 51

In another context, Bangladesh needed technical support for the mine-clearing operations at the Chattogram (earlier Chittagong) and the Mongla (earlier Chalna) sea ports. While a request to the UN for clearance operations was pending, the Soviet Union offered to provide the support “free of cost.” 52 Meanwhile, the UN offered a Swedish-funded professional salvage company to carry out the clearance operations at both ports. Bangabandhu did not make a hurried decision. Taking a middle path, he decided that it would be more pragmatic to give the mine-clearing tasks to the Soviet Union in the Chattogram Port and the UN team in the Chalna Port. The decision was based on a calculation that Bangladesh should
pursue a balanced policy of maintaining warm relations with both major powers and international institutions.

In the first three months of the salvage operations, from April to June 1972, the Soviet team made the Chattogram Port operational allowing it to handle 500,000 tons of merchandize per month. However, a few more sunken ships and mines needed to be removed which led to a decision to extend the Soviet salvage team's operations until June 1974. According to one estimate, the entire Soviet salvage team's 27-month operation towed away 26 damaged and sunken ships, removed nearly 2,000 tons of metal scrap from the sea-bottom, and cleared mines and other obstructions from 1,000 sq. miles of port area. For strategic analysts, with profound diplomatic acumen, Bangabandhu recognized that Chattogram Port constituted the life and blood of Bangladesh economy and the Soviet Union threw its diplomatic weight in the trying days of Bangladesh Independence. It was thus no surprise that he made a judicious use of the Soviet offer to reconstruct the Chattogram Port in the formative years of Bangladesh foreign policy.

At the domestic level, elite cohesion also played a supportive role in carrying out the foreign policy agenda of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib. He managed to assemble an able group of diplomats who would support all of his major decisions: whether the pursuit of UN membership or the effort to reach out to the Muslim World. Former Bangladeshi ambassadors describe how the Bangladeshi diplomats in Calcutta, Delhi, London, New York, and Washington, DC defected one after another and launched a diplomatic offensive to expose the Pakistani atrocities against innocent Bangladeshi (former East Pakistani) civilians. They also formed a task force to generate diplomatic and moral support for the Independence War of Bangladesh.

On domestic affairs, there were serious discontents about the deteriorating law and order situation and the rise of the ultra-leftists in the months following the Independence of Bangladesh. There were also concerns about the paramilitary force Jatiya Rakkhi Bahini emerging as a death squad, and the government using the Special Powers Act 1974 for preventive detention of political dissidents. On foreign affairs, there were apprehensions about possible Indian influence in the country and the failure to get U.S. food aid before the famine in 1974. Despite such
critiques, there was also remarkable consensus among the civilian and military elites and the Awami League party high-ups for a pragmatic foreign policy of not tilting toward any of the superpowers. Such a position confronted a small group of the cabinet members in the Mujib regime who favoured aligning with the Soviet Union. Bangabandhu visited Moscow in March 1972. In 1974, he commended the tasks of the Soviet salvage team at the Chattogram Sea Port. Yet, a rational choice for Bangladesh was to avoid becoming a pawn in global power politics. This is precisely how the foreign policy elites and Bangabandhu’s close confidants would craft a diplomatic stance that saw Bangladesh emerging as a NAM country and a spokesperson of the Third World in the UN platform. A seasoned diplomat describes this foreign policy orientation in the following words:

His [Bangabandhu’s] commitment to non-alignment stemmed from the deep-rooted belief that it was not in Bangladesh’s interest to be caught as a vulnerable nut in the nut-cracker jaws of the contesting powers … He [Bangabandhu] understood full well that neutrality entailed not getting enmeshed in the cut-throat rivalries of fiercely contesting great powers, whether between the powers in his immediate neighborhood (India and China) or the superpowers that dominated a deeply divided world (US-USSR).  

Public opinion also had an effect on shaping the foreign policy of the newly independent Bangladesh. On domestic politics, his search for building a Sonar Bangla (Golden Bengal) led to the adoption of four fundamental principles comprising nationalism, socialism, democracy, and secularism. Taken together these four principles call for upholding national identity, building an equal and just society, respect for people’s power, and creating an inclusive and tolerant society. On foreign affairs, he valued public aspirations. On the role of public opinion, one may wish to recount Bangabandhu’s conversation with Saudi King Feisal. When Saudi King expressed his concern that he was disheartened to see the break-up of Pakistan, a major Muslim country, Bangabandhu reminded him that Bangladesh took every single measure to keep the country united and it was West Pakistan’s discriminatory policy and oppression of the innocent Bengalis that caused the partition. This narrative of West Pakistani exploitation and colonialism well reflected the views of the Bangladeshi people. Bangabandhu also asserted that despite the Saudi displeasure with Bangladesh’s overtly secularist principle, Bangladeshi
people would remain devout Muslims, and they would continue to regard Saudi Arabia highly as the vanguard of the holy cities of Mecca and Medina. He added that Bangladeshi Muslims would continue to visit Saudi Arabia to perform the pilgrim.\textsuperscript{59}

7. Conclusion

Balancing divergent global powers is a formidable task for the foreign policy decision-makers of a newly independent country. This paper has explored how the transformational leadership of Bangabandhu accomplished this task in less than four years. It has also examined the factors that shaped his decision calculus. Findings reveal that neoclassical realism offers a useful theoretical framework for analyzing the foreign policy of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in the formative years of Bangladesh. Following the neoclassical realist theory of IR, it has shown that external incentives and pressures were channelled through the domestic political processes to shape Bangabandhu’s foreign policy decisions and outcomes. Five major decisions were delineated from diplomatic memoirs to study the foreign policy of Bangabandhu: the admission of Bangladesh to the UN, membership into the OIC, navigating through Cold War bloc politics, support for NAM and search for Third World leadership. The paper has shown that the Indo-Soviet support for Bangladesh and Sino-American support for Pakistan constituted the external incentives and pressures, respectively, for the Mujib regime. These external factors were transmitted through the domestic-level variables in which the articulation of national interest, transformational leadership, elite cohesion and public opinion shaped the foreign policy of Bangabandhu.

As Bangladesh celebrates the golden jubilee of independence and the birth centenary of Bangabandhu, there is a need for more theory-driven empirical research on Bangladesh foreign policy. Future studies will confront the limits of archival data. A digital archive of contemporary and historical materials will lend academics the requisite knowledge base to test the theories and concepts of foreign policy analysis. Collaboration between the academics and practitioners will also help bridge the gaps between theory and practice, and eventually contribute to informed policymaking.
Notes


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27 Author’s interview with Senior Official of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Bangladesh, Dhaka, 2012; See also, Nurul Momen, *Bangladesh in the United
28 Waliur Rahman, op. cit.


30 Author’s interview with a former Foreign Secretary of Bangladesh, 2019, and a former Bangladesh diplomat to Egypt, 2013.


Kamal Hossain, op. cit., p. 189.


Ibid.

Kamal Hossain, op. cit., p. 263.


Kamal Hossain, op. cit., p. 192.

Ibid.

Ibid., pp. 172-173.


Tariq Karim, op. cit.

Kamal Hossain, op. cit., p. 192.
Bangladesh Foreign Policy: Regional Politics and Policies under the Bangabandhu Regime between 1971 and 1975¹

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"We may be a small country, but we have many achievements to be proud of. We have sacrificed blood for achieving our independence. If anyone interferes in our internal affairs, we will resist them."


1. Introduction: A Slice of History to Begin with
Revisiting the past has its merit and pain. It is the month of December 2020 when I am writing this paper to revisit the birth of Bangladesh’s foreign policy in 1971—an expensive birth at the cost of three million lives, unfathomed traumas, and decades of harrowing struggles by seventy million people. The Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman [hereafter referred to as Bangabandhu] spent 4682 days in prison to lead the nation to become sovereign. Then East Pakistanis, now of course Bangladeshis, fought the Great Liberation War of 1971 under his
adroit leadership from the day he declared independence on 26 March 1971, until the very day of victory on 16 December 1971. Bangabandhu lived for 1314 days until the tragic assassination on 15 August 1975. The country lost its finest son. The world lost a multilateralist yet pragmatic statesman. The region lost a valiant leader who set the precedence of equitable cooperation and the spirit of multilateralism. In this very month of December, it is my humble task, as a multilateral institutionalism and international relations with consciousness about history, to remind that international relations student come with inescapable truths, indecent denials, and complicated interests of the statecraft. Hence, the administration under Bangabandhu is a reminder that the nation of Bangladesh is the nation of the victors.

If we flip through the pages of history, one will always find very few scholarly interventions and claims that the state leaders or the policymakers had permanently resolved a problem. Hence, international relations and its blind association with history and philosophy paint uncivil truths about civilized humankind. Even after the Cold War ended peacefully, history is full of heated debate about civilizations clashing.\(^2\) Bangabandhu assumed leadership when South Asia was a subject to great power game—United States of America and the Union of Socialist Soviet Republic—that invariably continued to heave conflicts among ideologies, practices, and institutions. Finding a permanent friend or foe was an elusive task—a task and miscalculation that has put many politicians of those decades into oblivion. It was more like making and implementing foreign and domestic policies inside a pinball machine, not the executive branches.

Moreover, for a newly independent and war-ravaged country, the task was even more complicated. It was not the internet era; information and inputs were slow, understanding of the details of global events remained obscure, and lack of knowledge led to many international fiascos. That means personality and wisdom, ideology and vision of the statesmen mattered the most. This is precisely where Bangabandhu’s wisdom lies. In any case, this paper is not about offering any predictions, instead of to look in the rear-view mirror to understand the very foundation of a war-torn sovereign nation’s foreign policy that converted Bangladesh into a “miracle” economy from Alexis Johnson’s “international basket case”.\(^3\)
That, too, in less than five decades in a region that received inconsistent attention from the "global powers. Bangabandhu made Dhaka once again a global capital with prosperity that was once the great center of muslin production, whose population fell from several lakhs in 1760 to about 50,000 by the 1820s due to the long British oppression". Bangabandhu had to deal with the Cold War that was at its height, marked by transitional decades that brought the ascent of globalization and financial deregulation, the reorientation of advanced capitalist economies towards services and post-industrial production, and the end of the extensive growth patterns of the 1950s and 1960s.

The global powers, namely China, France, the UK, the US, and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR) [now Russia], competed to reinforce their geostrategic power throughout the 1960s. Undeniably, the 60s and the 70s were two of the most tumultuous and divisive decades in world history, perpetuated by the civil rights movement and decolonization of Africa, the Cuban Missile Crisis, the Quiet Revolution in Canada, Prague Spring, the Vietnam War, and anti-war protests, the Bengali nationalism, political assassinations, and the emerging "generation gap". Zbigniew Brzezinski found that as an era in which "A great deal of world politics is a fundamental struggle, but it is also a struggle that has to be waged intelligently". One has to remember that war-torn Bangladesh had to sail through the highs of the 1970s and the Cold War climacteric until his untimely departure— a tragic assassination that the nation duly mourns.

Bangabandhu had to balance his domestic forte and the international affairs that begun with his strategic guidance to the government in exile—the Provisional Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, popularly known as the Mujibnagar Government. The government included the Republic's first cabinet, a nascent diplomatic corps, a Constituent Assembly, the Mukti Bahini, paramilitary and guerilla forces, and the Independent Bangladesh Radio. The provisional government was established in the town of Meherpur, Kushthia District. The oaths of the cabinet members were administered near the site of the Battle of Plassey, in which the British defeated the last independent Nawab of Bengal in 1757. The nation humbly appreciates the role of its immediate neighbour—India for its supports through allowing refugees from Bangladesh and sending military forces to join the
ongoing War on 3 December 1971, precisely thirteen days before the war ended. The war and the independence came after a devastating cyclone on 13 November 1970, that claimed 230,000 people that remained oblivious to the memory of the then capital Islamabad in West Pakistan. To recall, apart from a systemic institutional and political deprivation against the Bengalis in the East, the national government, based in West Pakistan, did too little to alleviate the suffering, further alienating the long-underrepresented Bengalis.9

However, going back to history, the fact that cannot be ignored is it was not voluntary participation for India. Operation Chengiz Khan, modeled after Israeli Operation Focus, was initiated by the Indian Air Force after the Pakistan Air Force launched surprise pre-emptive strikes on eleven airfields in north-western India on 3 December 1971. The air assault marked the official start of Indian presence in an already ongoing war. Former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi viewed the assault as Pakistan’s, precisely West Pakistan, declaration of war against India.10 Moreover, an age-old arch enemy sitting in a critical strategic location will not comfort India and its alliance. Bangladesh’s struggle for independence and India’s goal for the Pakistan-free North-eastern region naturally coincided.11 The UN Security Council was divided on “Unification” and “Independence”, and the world had to choose between realism and liberalism—state versus human rights. In the end, human aspiration had its victory. The US and China remained cautious in their approach to Bangladesh’s Great Liberation War, keeping Pakistan as a strategic intermediary, Sino-Soviet tilt became a cardinal point for the capitalist bloc, Indo-Soviet tie remained a subject to political qualm for both the Northern and Southern hemispheres, and South Asia became an ideological field of honor for the Soviet Commissars.

This paper has been written based on archival documents, some were declassified, and some would remain in anonymity, to understand the great statesman’s interaction with the dominant characters in international relations between 1947 and 1975. Hence, the focus remains on Bangabandhu’s visions, reflected through his interactions and the state’s formal engagement with the regional and international communities. He consummately linked domestic priorities with foreign affairs, global systems, and history. The paper bypasses popular rhetoric and political cliches used for myopic interests and releases anecdotal documents that
deserve attention among the new generation policy community, academia, and political actors. Perhaps, the paper may allow the readers to rethink Bangladesh’s foreign policy that often disconnects itself with the visionary principles laid out by Bangabandhu. That means the actual value of the “Friendship towards all, malice towards none” principle lies in practicing absolute independent foreign policy and the ability to reach out to any country—friendly or hostile—practically through diplomacy and military preparedness. I would leave the readers to relate the events that happened between 1971 and 1975, solely in terms of foreign policy, with the current state of affairs and the unfolding future of Bangladesh. It is up to the reader’s prejudice to review and evaluate the regimes since the Great Liberation War of 1971.

2. The Fundamental Elements of Global Politics: The Making of the Mujib Government’s Regional Approach

As this paper focuses on the regional countries, Bangabandhu’s approach to loosely structured regionalism, his approach to foreign policy caught the international community by surprise. The international, as well as the regional political communities, saw Bangabandhu as an agrarian and industrial reformer with little interest in the world’s capitalist revolution. Instead, he aligned himself with the Non Aligned Movement—an important political institution during the 1970s that lost its spirited momentum after the Cold War era, the Organisation of Islamic Countries that has emerged as a key institution for the Muslim countries, and of course, the United Nations—and he remained ideologically inspired to undertake egalitarian socialist policies to ensure the values of the liberation are translated through economic growth, social progress, and political development. That was the necessity of time. His approach included an even-handed relationship with the regional countries, respect for multilateral institutions, and reasonable center-periphery equations in a world divided into two hegemonic power blocs. That means Bangladesh embarked on a foreign policy that discourages interventions into a country’s internal affairs and reflects the domestic priorities over conflicting competitions.

In his regional approach, Bangladesh’s foreign policy saw three major countries in South and Southeast Asia as of critical geopolitical and
geostrategic importance. Let me be precise—India, Pakistan, and Myanmar. Geographically speaking, Bangabandhu was conscious about Bangladesh’s geostrategic setting—a nation sitting between South and Southeast Asia, a landmass with access to the Bay of Bengal, and regional pivot to be a partner in the growth of landlocked Nepal, Bhutan, and the Indian Northeast. The successive regimes in Bangladesh followed this geographical thinking, which prompted the Bangladesh foreign policy circles to form the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), formed in 1985 under the Ershad regime, and subsequently support the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) in 1997, under the first Sheikh Hasina regime. The current Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, daughter of Bangabandhu, actively encouraged BIMSTEC to set up its headquarters in Dhaka in 2014.

The tenure of Bangabandhu and his foreign policy were influenced by three key events and two critical issues with long-term implications in the regional political ecosystem. The 1947 partition of India, the Korean War, the 1962 Sino-Indian War, the 1965 Indo-Pakistan War, and the 1967 Nathu La and Chu La clashes. The MacMohan Line resulted from the 1914 Convention Between Great Britain, China, and Tibet (popularly known as Shimla Agreement). India regards its interpretation of the McMahon Line as the legal national border. However, China rejects the Simla Accord and the McMahon Line, contending that Tibet was not a sovereign state and therefore did not have the power to conclude treaties. However, a diplomatic memo by then Chinese Prime Minister Zhou Enlai shows that China does recognize a Line of Actual Control that is situated near the eastern part of China’s border with India.12 The Radcliffe Line became another critical feature that influenced Bangladesh’s foreign policy during the 1970s. The Radcliffe Line is the boundary demarcation that divided India and Pakistan, more precisely Punjab and Bengal provinces of British India, in 1947. The Western side of the Line serves as the India-Pakistan border, and the eastern side serves as the Bangladesh-India border since 1971.

The aftermath of the 1962 Sino-Indian war subsequently influenced transitions in the Chinese policy of neutrality in 1950 to ‘military assistance’ in 1966 to ‘strategic alliance’ in 1972 with Pakistan. It was a period of classic realism that calcified China’s response to the 1971
Liberation War of Bangladesh. Premier Zhou Enlai, on 23 January 1959, wrote to then Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, “First of all, I wish to point out that the Sino-Indian boundary has never been formally delimitated. Historically no treaty or Agreement on the Sino-Indian boundary has ever been concluded between the Chinese central government and the Indian Government”. He further mentioned:

“An important question concerning the Sino-Indian boundary is the question and the so-called MacMahon Line. I discussed this with Your Excellency as well as with Prime Minister U Nu. I would now like to explain again the Chinese Government’s attitude. As you are aware, the “MacMahon Line” was a product of the British policy of aggression against the Tibet Region of China and aroused the great indignation of the Chinese people. Juridically, too, it cannot be considered legal. I have told you that it has never been recognized by the Chinese central government. Although related documents were signed by a representative of the local authorities of the Tibet Region of China, the Tibet local authorities were in fact dissatisfied with this unilaterally drawn Line. And I have also told you formally about their dissatisfaction”. 13

Zhou Enlai and the Chinese government subsequently attached Burma [now Myanmar] as a key ally in Chinese engagement with India and Pakistan [particularly East Pakistan] and Sri Lanka as a crucial determinant regarding its presence in the Bay of Bengal zone. The Chinese position eventually led to the Sino-Indian War in 1962.

The Soviet diplomatic presence was crucial during and after the Sino-Indian War in 1962. An undisclosed Envoy from Moscow was sent to Delhi to talk with the Indian government regarding pragmatic negotiations with the PRC. An intelligence report sent by then USSR Ambassador Ivan Bendiktov on 10 October 1962, mentioned:

“India has finally rejected the proposal of the PRC about negotiations October 15 in Beijing. The Indian side continues to maintain that the recent clash on the eastern border occurred on Indian territory, south of the McMahon line, and was elicited by the advance of Chinese troops to the south and their attack on Indian posts. In fact, Comrade E. said, the entire affair was completely the opposite. Indian troops crossed the
McMahon line and attacked Chinese posts far to the north of that Line. Comrade E. talked about his last conversation in the Indian Foreign Ministry with the head of the China department, Menon. During this conversation Comrade E. asked Menon to take a map of the eastern part of the border, published in India in 1960, and find on it the region in which the clashes are now occurring, orienting by latitude and longitude the places indicated in the Indian notes. As a result it turned out that this region, the latitude and longitude of which were indicated by the Indians themselves, is located significantly to the north of the McMahon line on Chinese territory. Menon, in the words of Comrade E., was forced to acknowledge this, but maintained at the same time that it was not possible that the Indians had crossed the McMahon line and so forth”.14

The letter further noted,

“Comrade E. stated that the main things that will motivate India to end the conflict with the PRC are, on the international level, the wish to receive money from the USA, and on the domestic level the desire to suppress political forces which are objectionable to the ruling circles. Moreover, in the opinion of Comrade E., the Indian government has already gone too far in this conflict to have the possibility of returning to normal relations....”15

The Chinese response was further influenced by the Sino-Soviet split over the doctrinal and ideological divergences that stemmed from aberrant interpretations and functional suitability of Marxism-Leninism. Both the countries pursued diverse geopolitical ambitions during the Cold War in which India chose to remain closer to the socialist bloc led by USSR. Theoretically speaking, the Sino-Soviet split that underwent in the 1960s and 1970s became a historical benchmark in which both countries lost more from the split than they gained. Not only did the collapse of the alliance hand a strategic advantage to the United States, it also put pressure on Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev to move his domestic policies leftward and encouraged Mao Zedong to launch the disastrous Cultural Revolution.16 The Communist parties in Moscow and Beijing heralded themselves not only as national parties but also as leaders in global and
economic movements guided by a scientifically correct ideology. On matters of ideology and scientific correctness, Mao and Khrushchev believed that only one party could be correct—hence the split.

For the US President Lyndon Johnson's China, India, and Pakistan policies were influenced by the Korean Crisis [in which India was a good office for China], 1962 War, 1965 Indo-Pak War, and the 1967 Arab-Israeli War in which Pakistan became a critical part. In a conversation with the Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser, Premier Zhou Enlai told on 19 December 1963:

“This warning [US occupation in the Yalu River] was passed via the Indian ambassador to the United States. But the US government paid no attention to this warning. Not only this, but the United States also seized the opportunity to use its fleet to occupy Taiwan, turning Taiwan into a protectorate. This shows that the US occupation of Taiwan, following the launching of a war of aggression against Korea, was something planned in advance. In October 1950 US and UN forces drew near the bank of the Yalu River. At this time China finally could not but send its own volunteer army to aid Korea”.

“It was like your movie “Saladin,” which I saw last night, on the one hand fighting the enemy and on the other hand negotiating. With regard to negotiations over the Korean issue, they began from July 1951 and concluded in 1953, lasting a total of two years. The first step in the talks was both sides signing the armistice agreement and preparing the second step, the signing of a peace treaty conducive to Korean unification. But in 1954, in the negotiations of the Geneva Conference, there was a failure to conclude the issue of signing a peace treaty, thereby creating a kind of unstable armistice situation. The US 7th Fleet has since remained in the Taiwan Strait without leaving, occupying Taiwan.”

The China-Sri Lanka ties were influenced by the 1962 War, which in subsequent years made China to look at South Asia from a mix of geostrategic and economic interests. A cable from the Chinese Ambassador Colombo further influenced the Chinese attitude toward the region:

“Mrs. Bandaranaike is obviously taking sides with India, judging from her recommendations at the Colombo Conference and her so-called clarification of her recommendations during her visit to India. While
her attitude has weakened since the Premier [Zhou Enlai] and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs repeatedly reasoned and appropriately struggled with her, she feels that, [because] China and India did not sit down to talk at the table, she did not play her cards well and did not land any capital. Furthermore, her ruling term as prime minister is set to expire and, regardless of whether [she] can stay in power following the next general election, she is missing capital. It seems that she still has illusions about India no matter whether Nehru is in office or [Lal Bahadur] Shastri comes into power. She thinks China is easy to deal with, so she is always coming up with ideas about seven civil administration points in the Western Sector of the Sino-Indian border, asking China to make concessions”.

However, the Johnson administration crafted a balancing policy, deviating from Dwight D. Eisenhower’s engagement with Asia, to affirm its credibility without provoking the Soviets into testing it head-on. Brands mentioned,

“When India and Pakistan went to war in 1965, both sides fought with weapons provided by the United States, a shared dependency that ultimately allowed Johnson to force the two sides into a cease-fire. But neither country worried that the United States would actually use its military force to prevent it from going to war or to stop the fighting”.

While Johnson Administration had a balancing attitude, the Nixon administration came with a diametrically opposite view regarding the Indian sub-continent [read South Asia]. It was much to do with Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger’s personal opinions regarding then Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, Pakistan’s act as an intermediary between Washington and Beijing, and Sino-USSR split.

Pakistan acted as a conduit between the US and China as the Nixon administration geared its foreign policy to rebuild its relationship with China. While Zhou Enlai referred to the Bangladesh Liberation War as “purely an internal affair of Pakistan”, and “this can only be settled by the Pakistan people themselves and it needs no foreign interference whatsoever” in April 1971, at the same time, Washington and Beijing were engaged in important signaling—the Chinese with “Ping Pong diplomacy” and Nixon with public statements of interest in visiting
China—while Kissinger was waiting for Beijing’s response to the message sent in December 1971 through Yahya Khan. That prompted Washington to embark on its “Tilt” policy that came from Kissinger’s statement about Nixon: “He wants to tilt in favor of Pakistan”.

However, by December 1971, Kissinger was convinced that Bangladesh would be liberated; hence he told President Nixon, “Well, then the Pakistanis are going to lose”. The Nixon-Kissinger was convinced that the Chinese would do their part in this situation; hence, deploying the seventh fleet was debated. Kissinger told President Nixon:

“And you could tell the Chinese what you’re doing and tell them of the advantage for them to move some troops to the frontier. Now, some of these things I defend. Pakistan [sic.—India] is, in my view, going to move East. The Jordanians are going to move their two squadrons anyways. There are already Pakistani pilots. That is hardly [really?] necessary, so that countries like Iran don’t forget to [unclear—be impressed?—what in God’s name did Yahya do for us? When we get in trouble, this is what all these countries are going to do for us”.

On top of that, arms trade with Pakistan and Jordan featured in the US involvement with South Asia. Kissinger said,

“Well, the way we can make it legal is to resume arms sales through—if we, if you announce that Pakistan is now eligible for the purchase of arms”. He added, “If we had not closed the pipeline to Pakistan then Jordan could transfer its arms to Pakistan legally. Because the law says that any country which is receiving or eligible for American arms aid can receive American arms from other countries”.

Another cable released by the US Department of State mentioned: “Indian High Commissioner Atal has returned to Islamabad from high-level consultations in New Delhi

“carrying an important message.” Atal is an old friend of Yahya’s. After a long conversation with Yahya a week ago, Atal was reportedly impressed with Yahya’s plan to turn his government over to civilian leaders. Atal returned to New Delhi and, according to [less than 1 line of source text not declassified] reports from there, he planned to urge Mrs. Gandhi to give Yahya’s political timetable a chance. We have had
no reports yet on the outcome of those talks except for the fact that he is now back in Islamabad asking to see Foreign Secretary Sultan Khan immediately. On other diplomatic fronts, the press reports that Soviet Ambassador Rodironon has delivered a note to Yahya, but we have no firm knowledge yet of its contents. Press reports also indicate that Zhou Enlai reaffirmed the Chinese support for Pakistan stated to the Pakistani delegation two weeks ago, urged discussions to avoid war and accused India of intervention in Pakistan’s affairs.”

Meanwhile, Kissinger proposed President Nixon a three-option plan including, “Economic Assistance” for debt relief and development aid programme “as soon as the West Pakistanis could assure us that the money would go for development purposes, not to financing the war effort.” “Food Assistance” at the request of the government without any conditions on how and where the food will be distributed. And “Military Assistance” to allow all shipments but ammunition to proceed, and therefore, delay ammunition without taking any ‘formal action’.”

The complexity led the US to mobilize its support for a UN resolution on ceasefire. The representatives of Argentina, Belgium, Burundi, China, France, Italy, Japan, Nicaragua, Poland, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Syria, Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, United Kingdom, and the United States were present in the 1606th meeting. The USSR PR to the UN, Ambassador YakovAleksandrovich Malik, mentioned in that meeting:

“But it [USSR] is interested in peace and tranquillity throughout the world, including the Indian subcontinent, the Soviet Union approaches the situation which has arisen there objectively and impartially, What is the cause of that situation, which, as I have already pointed out, nine members of the Security Council recognized in their official letter as a “deteriorating situation”? And who would dare to declare again, at this table, that the deterioration of the situation dates from December 3, and that all was well before that?”

The Ambassador further mentioned:

“I submit that not one of the people now here would be so bold as to say such things. That is why the attempt of some speakers to close their eyes to the past, and to what has been happening at least since the beginning of this year or even since the month of March would be an
ostrich-like policy, a policy of closing one's eyes to reality, a policy of hiding one's head in the sand. We disapprove of such a policy". He added: "Millions of people were forced to leave their homeland, to forsake their land and property and to flee to the neighboring country of India, to become political refugees. That is a reality, and those are the facts. And anyone who closes his eyes to reality will have difficulty in finding the right way out of the situation." 

That's precisely what Bangladesh is doing for the persecuted Burmese today.

On 7 December 1971, USSR vetoed the UN Security Council resolution twice that called for "immediate ceasefire and withdrawal of troops." Premier Kosygin directed the USSR permanent representative to influence the Security Council not to treat the situation as purely an "Indo-Pakistan" conflict. The Nixon Administration decided to despatch the Taskforce 74 to Malacca Strait, part of the US Seventh Fleet, as a show of force by the US in support of West Pakistan and to deter the Soviet warships already present in the Bay of Bengal on 10 December 1971. While Kissinger's prediction that the war will be over, the US was more concerned about prolonged Indian and Soviet presence, backed by then Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, in the Bay of Bengal, which would eventually affect the Strait of Malacca. This was labeled as US strategic "Tilt" towards Pakistan by India. The Taskforce 74 was comprised of the Aircraft carrier USS Enterprise—at the time and still the world's largest aircraft carrier—that was already used during the Taiwan crisis and later could not prevent a communist victory in South Vietnam or earlier in China.

A declassified cable mentioned:

"On the morning of December 10 1971 and in response to the Indo-Pakistani War ENTERPRISE left Yankee Station enroute to the Straits of Malacca holding area as the Flagship of Task Force 74. Commander Task Force 74 was Rear Admiral D.W COOPER, USN. ENTERPRISE and her escorts arrived at a holding area Northeast of Singapore on December 12. With Task Force 74 assembled, ENTERPRISE transited the Strait of Malacca on December 14, arriving in the Indian Ocean on December 15. After one day of operations at point "Alpha1", West
of the Andaman Sea, Task Force 74 moved to point "Charlie", off the Southern tip of India, to await instructions from higher authority. Indian Ocean operations were devoted to contingency planning, surface surveillance and reporting. During Task Force 74’s stay in the Indian Ocean at least one unit (and usually more) of the Soviet Indian Ocean Force was in company with the Task Force. December 31 found ENTERPRISE in the middle of the Indian Ocean thousands of miles and over half a world away from Newport News, Virginia where she began, 12 months and 85,000 nautical miles ago."

Bangabandhu was well aware that President Nixon and the Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi had a toxic relationship, which resulted in further divisive regional politics. Although Indira Gandhi told the US Ambassador to Delhi, Daniel Patrick Moynihan that, “I don’t think you are supporting Pakistan. If you had taken a stronger line with (Pakistan military ruler) Yahya (Khan), you would have done more for Pakistan”. The meeting between President Nixon and Indira Gandhi, during the visit of Indira Gandhi to Washington DC from 3-6 November 1971, could not alter the US position on Pakistan. There was no indication that

“Mr. Nixon had agreed to Indian proposals that the United States exert pressure on President Yahya to release Sheik [Sheikh] Mujib and to negotiate through him a peaceful political solution to East Pakistan’s civil war. Nor was there any indication that the United States would step up its pressures on President Yahya to accept the return of all the refugees.”

Mrs. Gandhi was reported to have told Mr. Nixon that India could not agree to United States proposals either for a troop withdrawal from the frontiers or for a United Nations “presence” in the form of observers on Indian soil.  

However, Prime Minister Gandhi resisted the immediate pressures from Delhi and Calcutta [now Kolkata] based politicians to undertake a hardline approach and decisive actions such as military move against and humanitarian interventions in Pakistan and to declare recognition of Bangla Desh [Bangladesh]. Nonetheless, Indira Gandhi and her advisers apparently were divided in recognizing Bangladesh during the first months of the Liberation War since they believed it could compel Islamabad to
declare war—this Mrs. Gandhi had seemed eager to avoid. India was suffering from economic outrage, ‘Garibi-Hatao’ [Remove Poverty], GDP shrunk from 5.2 per cent in 1970 to 1.6 per cent in 1971\textsuperscript{39}, inflation was around 20 per cent along with steep fall in agricultural production and employment.\textsuperscript{40} The cost of war, at the expense of emotional nationalism, would have a vicious effect on the economy leading to mass unpopularity of the Gandhi government in the coming years. However, the Bangladesh War became a part of Indira Gandhi’s diversionary foreign policy, which resulted in an upsurge in her popularity on 16 December 1971—the day Bangladesh emerged as a sovereign, independent state.\textsuperscript{41}

This background of complex geo-strategic conundrums and geopolitical contests exposes global powers’ failure in giving consistent and collective weight to the strength of the passionate struggle of the “Bangladeshis.” As a result, the history of Bangladesh’s independence and the Great Liberation War of 1971 has often been interpreted as the Indo-Pakistan War, at times civil war, and often seen as a regime-specific phenomenon. The very genesis of the Bangladeshi [or Bengali] nationalism emerged from an inspiration of establishing a democratic socio-political structure and a shift from a state based on religion where democratic traditions were almost non-existent and where the popular will had been often undermined. The racial hatred and ethnic difference had been a core element in the East-West blaze for the peoples of the two unique states of Pakistan, separated by over 1,000 miles of Indian sovereign territory.

The global political rhetoric, particularly among the great powers, failed to meaningfully take account of the fact that though the East had the majority comprised of 71 million people, compared to the West’s 61 million population, Dhaka remained the passive recipient of development funds, factories, public-works projects, foreign aid, imports, and defense facilities. Prices were higher in the East, but income lower. The jute and other exports from the East brought in more than half of Pakistan’s foreign exchange and paid for the raw materials that kept the West’s factories going. The East was also the primary market for the West’s products, including the sleazy cotton fabrics, sold at inflated government-fixed prices, which have no market anywhere else in the world. Bengali nationalists complained that the colonial exploitation of their land under
the West Pakistanis was worse than under the British a generation before.\textsuperscript{42} The power transfer to Awami League (then the only major party from East Pakistan), after 7 December 1970, General Elections, was refused by then-President Yahya Khan and the Pakistan Peoples Party. However, the USSR remained closer to the causes of the Bangladeshi struggle, and China and the US remained plagued with the interplays of geopolitics and cynical realism. One must remember, Bangabandhu was well aware of the toxicity in US-USSR-China-India-Pakistan quadrilateral relations; hence, that shaped his approach to the regional countries.

3. The Post-Liberation War Regional Policy: The Period of Great Maneuver

In the post-Liberation War period, Bangabandhu, as the Prime Minister of Bangladesh, chose independent foreign policy, multilateralism over parochial bilateralism, egalitarianism over cynical capitalism, and neoliberal institutionalism over reactionary realism. Bangabandhu explicitly mentioned:

"I put forward a proposal on foreign policy. I suggested that the Awami League should have an independent and neutral foreign policy. Abdus Salam Khan opposed this suggestion and accused me of being too radical in my approach. I responded by labeling him as too reactionary and so he got exactly what he deserved. My proposal was approved and, realizing that the mood of the meeting was against him, he did not dare bring the issue to a vote".\textsuperscript{43}

That means his administration during the years between 1971 and 1975 can be explained through structural liberalism, which denotes cooperation, though desirable, is not automatic, is attainable through states’ pursuance of commoninterests and states’ management of world affairs.\textsuperscript{44} While Bangabandhu learned from history that “international politics is a struggle for power”\textsuperscript{45}, intra and interstate wars remain a feature of the “anarchic world”,\textsuperscript{46} and the post-Cold War may resemble the Hobbesian world of anarchy: insecure, brutal and bloody.\textsuperscript{47} Hence, given the global and regional contexts, and with the lessons from the past in mind, under Bangabandhu’s leadership, the Constitution of Bangladesh, adopted on 4 November 1972, enacted on 16 December 1972, clearly endorsed that:}\textsuperscript{48}
Article 25: Promotion of international peace, security and solidarity

The State shall base its international relations on the principles of respect for national sovereignty and equality, non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries, peaceful settlement of international disputes, and respect for international law and the principles enunciated in the United Nations Charter, and on the basis of those principles shall -

(a) Strive for the renunciation of the use of force in international relations and for general and complete disarmament;

(b) Uphold the right of every people freely to determine and build up its own social, economic and political system by ways and means of its own free choice; and

(c) Support oppressed peoples throughout the world waging a just struggle against imperialism, colonialism or racialism.

The current and future historians and the foreign policy practitioners may note that multilateral idealism became the principal guiding factor for the constitutional provisions for international relations. Multilateral idealism was a viable option for a newly independent state in the world that was divided into two blocs—the US and USSR. This imperfect bipolar system, as our thinking goes, offered puzzling space for a pragmatic synthesis between bilateralism and multilateralism. At least, Bangabandhu’s meetings with his counterparts in Moscow and Washington were influenced by the US grand strategy and the USSR’s Marxist revisionism that led to the Sino-Soviet split. Hence, what international relations theorists call as “the problems of anarchy”—hegemonic struggles, power transitions, competition for security, spheres of influence, and reactionary nationalism and realism determined Bangladesh’s position in the world order of the 1960s and 1970s. Bangabandhu’s policies were influenced by both “Kosygin Reform,” the Chinese form of communism, and of course, the principles of multilateralism. Bangabandhu asserted absolute political autonomy, defended national interest and ensured strategic autonomy of the armed forces. His leadership and foreign policy decision making show a far more sophisticated and complex demeanor regarding the regional
issues than most of the simplistic views seen in the popular press and rhetoric. While the regional countries resorted to rally round the Flag Syndrome and diversionary foreign policies, reconstruction of the country and reforms in the civil and economic affairs remained the prime priorities for the political leadership.

Let me recall the return of Bangabandhu in the newly independent Bangladesh. This would set the genesis of Bangabandhu’s regional policies. Bangabandhu was arrested on 26 March 1971, and taken to a heavily guarded prison near Faisalabad (then Lyallpur) in West Pakistan. He was released for the last time from Pakistani prison on 8 January 1972, soon after the birth of Bangladesh, and received a phone call from Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi on 8 January 1972, from a hotel in London. Prime Minister Gandhi told him that she had changed her mind, and after discussion with British Prime Minister Edward Heath, a special flight was arranged to bring Sheikh Mujib to India with a stopover at Delhi on his return to newly independent Bangladesh. While meeting with British Prime Minister Edward Heath at 10 Downing Street, he told Mujib that the UK would give diplomatic recognition to the newly independent Bangladesh only after Indian troops were withdrawn by 31 March 1972. However, Britain recognized Bangladesh on 4 February 1972.

During the flight to Dhaka via Delhi, Bangabandhu asked Mr. Shashanka Banerjee, an Indian diplomat accompanying him from London to Delhi, to convey a message from him to Prime Minister Gandhi to consider withdrawing the Indian Armed Forces within three months to 31 March 1972, bringing forward the date of the withdrawal from 30 June 1972, which she had announced earlier. The message was duly conveyed to the Indian Prime Minister. In response, Prime Minister Gandhi asked Mr. Banerjee to tell ‘Sheikh Sahab’—that is how she used to address Mujib—to bring the subject of what he wanted directly to her at the Summit meeting.

“J passed the PM’s message to ‘Bongo Bondhu’ accordingly”. “At the Summit, Prime Minister Gandhi conveyed to Bangabandhu directly about her willingness that the Indian Armed Forces would be withdrawn from the soil of Bangladesh as per Sheikh Sahab’s request, by 31 March 1972.”
In fact, Bangabandhu’s effort to ensure the withdrawal of the Indian troops gave a clear signal to many of the Muslim countries, including the ones in the Arabian Gulf, that Bangladesh is not a country occupied by India. As a process to ensure strategic autonomy of Bangladesh, he was prompt in raising the Bangladesh Military Academy in Cumilla on 29 November 1973 at the Cumilla Cantonment. He addressed the first batch of BMA cadets and told them that East Pakistan demanded a Military Academy, but West Pakistan never appreciated that. Being proud of the first military academy in Bangladesh, Bangabandhu mentioned that this military academy’s reputation should not be limited within South and East Asia; its dignity should be exemplary for the rest of the world.

The first artillery unit of the Bangladesh Army was formed on 22 July 1971, in Konababan of India with six cannons (3.7-inch Howitzers), including the two presented by India. Bangladesh first got tanks in 1974 during Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman’s trip to Egypt. The then Egyptian President Anwar Sadat presented Bangabandhu with 44 tanks.

The first Air Wing of the Liberation War was formed on 28 September 1971, at Dimapur of Nagaland, India. The air wing possessed a meager inventory of one DC-3 airplane, one Otter airplane, and one Alluette helicopter. The nascent Bangladesh Air Force officers and staff formed a flying unit named “Kilo Flight”. After independence, the country immediately got military assistance from USSR, among others in the form of MiG-21MF and MiG-21UM. The nucleus of BN was formed in June-July 1971 when a handful of courageous sailors defected from Toulon, France, where they were undergoing submarine training. After the Liberation War, the government of Bangladesh and the then naval leadership felt the necessity of building a strong navy. By this time, in 1973, about 2500 sailors, including 30 officers and midshipmen being released from captivity in Pakistan, started joining the hands of the new borne navy. In 1974, Naval bases BNS ISSA KHAN, BNS HAJI MOHSIN, and BNS TITUMIR were commissioned by Bangabandhu, who was then the Prime Minister.

Bangabandhu visited Calcutta [now Kolkata] on 6 February 1972, at the Government of India’s invitation. The Treaty of Peace and Friendship between the Government of India and the Government of Bangladesh was
signed during this visit. The treaty was inspired by common ideals of peace, secularism, democracy, socialism, and nationalism and still serves as a foundation for Bangladesh’s peaceful approach towards its neighbouring countries. Among many other critical areas of cooperation, Bangabandhu’s vision led to:

"Article 6: "The high Contracting Parties further agree to make joint studies and take point action in the fields of flood control, river basin development and the development of hydro-electric power and irrigation".58 "Article 8: In accordance with the ties of friendship existing between the two countries each of the high Contracting Parties solemnly declares that it shall not enter into or participate in any military alliance directed against the other party".59 And "Article 9: Each of the high Contracting Parties shall refrain from giving any assistance to any third party taking part in an armed conflict, against the other party. In case either party is attacked or threatened with attack, the high contracting parties shall immediately enter into mutual consultations in order to take appropriate effective measures to eliminate the threat and thus ensure the peace and security of their counties."60

Bangabandhu continued his moral high ground by putting faith in this treaty and bolstered the bilateral relationship toward an even-handed relationship.

However, one must note the unseen vision of Bangabandhu here too. The Prime Ministers of these two neighbouring countries signed the Land Boundary Agreement in 1974 to exchange enclaves, simplify their international border, settle the decades-old land boundary dispute, and ease potential conflicts over borders. Bangladesh parliament ratified the LBA in 1974; nonetheless, a revised version of the Agreement was adopted by the two countries on 7 May 2015, when the Parliament of India passed the 100th Amendment to India’s Constitution. It took 41 years for India to ratify the treaty. Another critical foreign policy benchmark of the Mujib regime is Bangabandhu’s visit to Moscow, and Indian ally, USSR from 1 to 5 March 1972. The USSR is intrinsically linked with Bangladesh’s Liberation. During his visit, Bangabandhu delivered an important message
to the world through Moscow: “Bangladesh needs help from friendly countries like the Soviet Union, but such assistance must be without any strings attached”.61

Of course, Bangabandhu’s visits to China in 1952 and 1957 influenced his political philosophy and economic strategies. Bangabandhu mentioned in his book:

“The Chinese used to pray in these temples for a good harvest. Nevertheless, the people of China no longer believed that merely praying for a good harvest would lead to one. The communist government had confiscated the land owned by landlords and had distributed it among all farmers. Thus landless peasants had become landowners. They were trying to increase the harvest and help the government. They no longer gave a part of the harvest to landlords who had done no work. The farmers were working indefatigably. All of them believed that China now belonged to peasants and workers and that the class that used to dominate and exploit them had had their day.”62

However, Bangabandhu’s challenges were to gain access to the UN and OIC, food aid, foreign exchange, and resources to reconstruct the country. Bangladesh entered a trade deal with Cuba in violation of the US’s embargo, which thus forfeited US development aid when famine was imminent in 1974. Nevertheless, to overcome the situation, Bangabandhu visited the US, Iraq, Egypt, and Kuwait. During July, August, September, and October 1974, Bangabandhu sent senior ministers and officials to hold series of meetings with various international agencies and leaders of developed and Middle East countries to apprise them of the economic crisis in Bangladesh. Hence, to bolster the country’s growth, he reached out to the global community and relied less on the regional countries since they suffered from economic crises.

Bangabandhu’s policies corresponded to India-US aid relations. The United States has invested in India’s development since President Harry Truman’s signed the India Emergency Food Assistance Act in 1951.53 In 1960, food aid to India accounted for 92 percent of the annual assistance budget. In the late 1970s, projects included rural electrification, fertilizer promotion, malaria control, agricultural credit, integrated health and population programs, irrigation schemes, and social forestry.64 Both
Presidents John F Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson understood that food aid could serve to diplomatic ends and bolstered US strategic interest. President Johnson used PL-480 agreements as leverage in securing support for US foreign policy goals, even placing critical famine aid to India on a limited basis, until he received assurance that the Indian Government would implement agricultural reforms and temper criticism of US policy regarding Vietnam. A New York Times report mentioned:

“Although a series of requests as been made in New Delhi and Washington, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi has, by all accounts, been reluctant to ask formally for a food deal or a soft loan from the United States. Indeed, Indian officials are urging the United States to offer help to India.”

The US formally recognized Bangladesh as a sovereign state on April 4, 1972, and provided US$300 million aid. Since then, the US remained as a key development partner and disbursed over US$6 billion in assistance. Under the Public Law 480 (PL-480) program of food and other agricultural commodity assistance, the US sent a large quantity of emergency food aid to cope with the postwar famine situation. Project assistance through the United States Agency for International Development (AID) began in 1973 with an effective program of reconstruction and infrastructure rehabilitation. On 30 October 1974, Kissinger made a 19-hour stopover in Bangladesh. During the visit, he met Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib for a couple of hours at the “Gonobhaban”.

Nonetheless, Bangabandhu demanded immediate withdrawal of all foreign troops from North Vietnam. In an interview with Bangladesh Sangbad Shangstha (BSS), he condemned activities such as bombing, seizing ports, and expansion of the war, and he opined that these could not be conducive to a peaceful resolution of the ongoing conflicts in the region. He mentioned, “the US government should understand that these activities never bring any success; rather threaten world peace”.

Expressing solidarity with the people of Vietnam, Bangabandhu said that his government and countrymen fully support the idea that the Vietnam War should be resolved by the people of Vietnam alone. No foreign power should interfere in their internal affairs.
Bangabandhu was well briefed about the Nixon-Indira meeting that took place in the White House on 5 November 1971. In that meeting, “President Nixon discussed the purpose and objectives of his trip to Peking. The President emphasized that he had long sought to terminate the period of non-communication between the United States and the 750 million people in the People’s Republic of China. He explained that his approach was pragmatic, and that communication could only serve to improve the overall environment in Asia and to ease tensions by alleviating the frustrations generated by isolation. In response, Prime Minister Gandhi expressed support for the President’s decision to visit Peking and noted that opposition within her own country frequently worked to prevent initiatives dictated in the overall interest of peace. Had she reacted incorrectly; it would have tended to unite the opposition. She had managed to keep the opposition divided and therefore less effective.”

While India remained as a win-win ally, Pakistan remained as an Achilles Heel. Repatriation of Bangladeshis from Pakistan and Pakistanis from Bangladesh remained a prime feature for the Mujib regime. In April, Bangabandhu sent a message to UN Secretary-General Kurt Waldheim proposing unconditional and immediate repatriation of all Bengalis from Pakistan and all Pakistanis from Bangladesh. The Secretary-General visited Bangladesh on 9 January 1973. Subsequently, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees Sadruddin Aga Khan to Dhaka in May 1973. A trilateral agreement for repatriation, popularly known as the Delhi Agreement, was signed between India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh on 28 August 1973, and ratified only by India and Pakistan. The Agreement provided scopes for three streams of movement for repatriation: i. Pakistani Prisoners of War (PoW) and civilian internees in India, ii. Bengalis from Pakistan to Bangladesh, and iii. non-Bengalis from Bangladesh to Pakistan. The movement of PoWs and civilian internees was the responsibility of the Government of India. Soon after the Delhi Agreement, the Governments of Bangladesh and Pakistan requested the Secretary-General’s assistance in implementing the Delhi Agreement. In turn, the Secretary-General asked the High Commissioner to continue his role as executing agent, this time for a UNHCR operation on a far larger
scale (than 1971). By 1974, the Pakistani government had transferred 108,000 Biharis to Pakistan.

The Pakistan equation was heavily linked with Bangabandhu's bid for membership in the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (formerly known as the Organisation of the Islamic Conference). Access to OIC would give Bangladesh immediate access to 24 Muslim majority countries [now 57 members in 2020] and the Islamic fraternity of diverse economic and political backgrounds. Additionally, oil price and supply became a core issue for Bangladesh's economy and industrialization. This was phenomenally challenging—both at home and abroad. Bangabandhu felt the need to establish relations with the Muslim world for its economic growth, development, and socio-cultural linkages. Muslim countries had a divided opinion on the Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971. The conservative Arab states considered unified Pakistan as an avowedly Islamic state, while independent Bangladesh as a fracture to Muslim brotherhood. The Muslim nations mourned to the shuddered Pakistan and maintained a closer tie with Pakistan. Henry Kissinger requested King Faisal of Saudi Arabia to participate in the Bangladesh Liberation War. Saudi Arabia sent F86 aircraft to help camouflage the extent of Pakistan Air Force’s losses, and perhaps as a potential training unit to prepare Pakistani pilots for an influx of more F5s from Saudi Arabia.

The conservative blocs remained discouraged in helping the new nation, which was further intensified due to Bangabandhu's socialist policies. Malaysia and Indonesia recognized Bangladesh in 1972, Pakistan, Turkey, and Iran recognized Bangladesh on 22 February 1974, followed by the Gulf states. However, throughout the late 1973 and early 1974, President Anwar el-Sadat of Egypt, Col. Muammar Qaddafi of Libya, and King Faisal have quietly sought to reconcile between Bangladesh and Pakistan, mostly because their hostile relationship blunted the cause of Islamic unity. Bangladesh became a member of OIC in 1974. Bangabandhu participated in the 2nd OIC Summit in Lahore, Pakistan, held just two days after Pakistan recognized Bangladesh as a sovereign state. The Foreign Ministers of the OIC countries, already visiting Lahore by then, decided to send a seven-member delegation to Dhaka on 21 February 1974.
The Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Kuwait Sabah Al Ahmed Al Jaber Al Sabah, who later became Ruler and 5th Emir of Kuwait, led the delegation and played a crucial role in bridging the Bangladesh-Pakistan relations in 1974. Other members of the delegation included Lebanon’s Foreign Minister Fouad Naffah, Somalia’s Foreign Minister Omar Arteh Ghalib, the Director-General of OIC for political affairs in the Algerian Foreign Ministry Abdul Hamid al-Jabir, Senegal’s Ambassador in Iran Massavba Sarre, a representative of the Palestine Liberation Organization Abu Hishmam, and Secretary-General of the Islamic Secretariat Hassan al-Tohamy. The delegation to hold an exhaustive discussion with Bangabandhu regarding Bangladesh’s participation in the Lahore Summit and Pakistan’s unconditional recognition of Bangladesh. Pakistani Prime Minister Bhutto announced Pakistan’s unconditional recognition of Bangladesh on the evening of 22 February 1974. The Algerian President Houari Boumediene, en route to Lahore, took a stopover in Dhaka to accompany Bangabandhu and Mr Sabah on 23 February 2020.

The importance of NAM needs to be highlighted in understanding the regional equations. NAM has 124 members and 26 observer states. All the South Asian countries were part of the non-aligned movement, including the Southeast Asian neighbour Myanmar. This allowed Bangladesh to be a part of the same alliance with its natural neighbours and the international community. This was when the relationship between President Boudmediene and Bangabandhu grew since Bangabandhu’s participation in the Fourth Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Non-aligned countries in Algiers, Algeria from 5-9 September 1973. Former Yugoslav President Josip Broz Tito, a close acquaintance of Bangabandhu, convinced Bangabandhu to attend the NAM Summit. President Tito visited Dhaka from 29 January to 2 February 1974. President Tito was invited to deliver a speech at the Parliament on 31 January 1974. The NAM Summit was represented by more than half of the member states of the international community representing the majority of the world’s population.

While OIC allowed Bangladesh to reach out to the Muslim world, OIC enabled Bangladesh to widen its relationship with the developing countries. While NAM is criticized for being a platform for political and ideological issues, rather than to dwell on “bread and butter” questions, it was a gateway for the two-year-old Bangladesh to reach a wider world. Bangabandhu pronounced the historical statement in the Algiers summit,
“The world is now divided into two parts-repressors and the repressed. I am on the side of the repressed masses.”

While embracing Bangabandhu during the Summit, then Cuban President Fidel Castro said,

“I have not seen the Himalayas. But I have seen Sheikh Mujib. In personality and in courage, this man is the Himalayas. I have thus had the experience of witnessing the Himalayas.”

NAM and Bangabandhu’s understanding of regional politics and China-Myanmar ties helped Bangladesh focus on Burma [now Myanmar]. Bangabandhu also gave careful attention to Bangladesh’s relationship with Burma [now Myanmar]. While Bangabandhu had equal-handed relations with India and Pakistan, he realized the importance of providing substantial weightage to Burma. He met the then Burmese President U Ne Win several times in international forums. Given the deep respect for Bangabandhu and the newly liberated country, President Win visited Dhaka from 26 to 30 April 1974. During a banquet, Bangabandhu said,

“The world-wide inflation and rising prices of our imports have made further claims on our scarce resources, which we need for the urgent task of economic development. We should strive together to establish a just international economic order in which the growing and pressing problems of developing countries may be satisfactorily resolved”.

President Win mentioned, “It is in the mutual interest of our two peoples to continue to develop good-neighborly relations and cooperation in all areas of common interest”. President Win further mentioned,

“We were constantly praying that reason prevails among our friends, and we now rejoice that a magnanimous settlement has been reached as a result of friendly exchanges between Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan. A new era of understanding and goodwill has begun, which we are convinced will contribute to the cause of peace, stability, and progress in this part of the world. We laud the leaders of the three countries, who in the face of formidable difficulties, have been able to show great statesmanship”.

The Bangladesh policymakers were well aware that East Pakistan [hence Bangladesh] already received refugees from Burma who arrived in Chittagong via Naf River in November 1948.
In a declassified communication between the British High Commissioner to Karachi and the Commonwealth Office, London, UK, dated 17 December 1948, mentioned that “According to the Commissioner of the Chittagong Division, 100 boats of refugees recently arrived on the Pakistan side of the Naf river.”

To resolve the refugee issue, a meeting was proposed to be held in Chittagong on 29 July 1948, between U Pe Kin, the Burmese Ambassador to Karachi, Mr. Aurangzeb Khan, Pakistan Ambassador to Rangoon, and the Prime Minister U Nu. The meeting was later on called off. The military, under General Ne Win, formed the Burma Socialist Programme Party, which lasted for twenty-six years, with an agenda to eliminate ethnic strifes and integrate the ethnic communities through military-controlled elections. General Win embarked on ethnic engineering by enacting the Citizenship Act (also known as the Burma Citizenship Law) excluded the Rohingyas as a national race among the country’s 135 national races. This added further conflict dynamic on the longstanding tensions between the present-day Rakhine Buddhists and the Rohingya Muslims. Bangabandhu’s communication with President Win subsequently guided the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the following regimes to pragmatically engage with Myanmar.

4. Concluding Thoughts: Regional Priorities as a Part of Global Vision

For Bangabandhu, repatriation, economic development, welfare, and international recognition remained priorities. By 1972, Bangladesh received membership of the International Monetary Fund, International Labour Organization, Inter-Parliamentary Union, UNESCO, Colombo Plan, and GATT (9 November). Bangladesh formally applied for UN membership on 8 August 1972, and duly approached the UN Security Council for their support. On 8 August 1972, Bangladesh officially forwarded an application to UN Secretary-General seeking UN membership. Bangladesh, on 10 August wrote to all members of the Security Council for their support. At the 1660th meeting on 25 August 1972, Bangladesh failed to obtain a recommendation for admission owing to the negative vote of a permanent member [China]. The application was reconsidered, and a recommendation was adopted at the 1776th
Bangladesh gained its membership on 17 September 1974. Bangabandhu delivered a speech in Bengali for which Bangladeshis laid lives in 1952. In his maiden speech at the 29th General Assembly, which marks Bangladesh’s first presence in the UN, he said:

“But we defy dissolution. In facing these battles of life, people’s power of resistance and firm commitment is the final word. Self-reliance is our goal. People’s joint effort is our prescribed course of action.”

In 1975, Bangladesh was elected Vice-President of the General Assembly of the United Nations.

Meanwhile, before becoming a member of the UN, at the request of United Nations Secretary-General Kurt Waldheim, then President of the World Bank, Robert McNamara, flew to Dhaka on 31 January 1972, to meet Bangabandhu. After the talks, the World Bank sent a technical team from Delhi as part of a United Nations emergency relief operation. Two years later, in 1974, at the invitation of US President Gerald Ford, Bangabandhu paid a visit to Washington DC. He met Robert McNamara once again in DC. At a meeting, Mr. McNamara asked Bangabandhu, “Mr. President, when are you devaluing your currency?” Bangabandhu remained unfazed by the question, and calmly said: “if you were my finance minister in place of Tajuddin Ahmed, I could have done it tomorrow morning.”

Perhaps, Professor Rehman Sobhan, then Member of the Planning Commission, influenced Nurul Islam, then Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission, to suggest the World Bank to request Norwegian political economist Just Faaland to assume the position of the World Bank’s first country representative in Bangladesh. Faaland was a key person responsible for the formulation of the Malaysian New Economic Policy and later served as the Director General of the International Food Policy Research Institute and Chairman of the UN Committee for Development Planning.

However, Bangabandhu’s meeting with President Gerald Ford at the Oval Office on 1 October 1974, bears a significant moment for Bangladesh’s foreign relations and his views on regional countries. The meeting was attended by Kamal Hossain, then Bangladesh Foreign Minister, M. Hossain Ali, and Brent Scowcroft, Deputy Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs. During the Mujib-Ford meeting, President Ford mentioned:
“It is good to have you here. It is the first time an American President has met with the head of state of Bangladesh”.91 Bangabandhu told President Ford, “You know the history of my country. Its condition after the war was likened to that of Germany in 1945. I want to thank you for your help to us. Before the war, we were divided by India. The capital was all in the West. Bangladesh wasn’t too bad in 1947. Seventy percent of the representatives in the Parliament were from the West; I was in the Parliament. Most of the Administration was destroyed in the war or left for India. Even in the rest, we couldn’t get out of the West. Everyone has been suffering, first from the war, then from drought, then from the floods. Thanks to help from countries like you, no one is starving. We have had to import everything. Since then we started to bring our trade deficit down, until the inflation, drought and the floods came.”92

He further added,

“We are suffering so badly from the oil prices”.93 President Ford mentioned: “We congratulate you on your independence and UN membership. I was up there two weeks ago. I was encouraged with the improving attitude toward the UN. The American people in recent times have a better attitude towards the United Nations. I hope we can all work better in the United Nations. If it is just a debating society, it is no good. But we should use it to make it work.”94

Hence, young Bangladesh made its mark in international relations between 1971 and 1975. Bangabandhu showed a clear path of statesman beyond myopic political interests, and by rendering outstanding political acumen that requires sophisticated balancing between domestic priorities and pragmatic foreign policy. He maneuvered through different axis in international relations and developed a meaningful relationship with a versatile range of global personalities that includes Indira Gandhi of India to Zulfikar Ali Bhutto of Pakistan to Fidel Castro of Cuba, from Houari Boumediene of Algeria to Marshal Josip Broz Tito of Yugoslavia to Anwar Sadat of Egypt, Alexei Kosygin of the Soviet Union to Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan of the Emirates, from Sir Edward Heath of the United Kingdom to Kakuei Tanaka of Japan, and from Senator Edward Kennedy to Prince Karim Aga Khan. Bangabandhu had to deal with the benevolent statesmen,
egotistical superpowers, hedonist politicians, political uncertainties, and of course, astigmatic adventures of the neighbouring countries, predominantly India, Myanmar, and Pakistan.

Both at bilateral and regional levels, Bangladesh pursued policies of respecting other nations and encouraged self-determination, democracy, human rights, gender equality, economic development, and much greater access to welfare. In his exiguous span of political life in independent Bangladesh, that’s between 1971 to 1975, Bangabandhu embarked on a positive and active course of world leadership with the object of preserving national interest. He had no time to waste; that’s the biggest lesson for the nation to remember. The regional policy issues and priorities mentioned in this paper highlights the promises and perils of foreign relations with major powers and the neighbouring countries between 1971 and 1975. Viewing the four years of Bangabandhu’s role in international relations in independent Bangladesh, one can aptly understand that Bangladesh had to balance the balance of power between the US and USSR. That was a period in which these two competing states, in its simplest form, exercised power either through relatively crystallized strategy and/or through assertive behaviour.95 Bangabandhu’s meetings in Delhi, Lahore, Moscow, and Washington testify to the necessity of balancing the bipolar world, which now has shifted to Beijing-Washington tautness. Then, Bangladesh’s foreign relations were the product of inescapable historical forces and a war-ravaged country’s socio-economic needs. Undoubtedly, the post-Liberation Bangladesh struggled to alter the colonial institutions and mindsets highly resistant to reform. His relations with India, Pakistan, and Myanmar were calibrated for Bangladesh’s national interest and strategic excellence. It is worth it then for the young historians and the diplomats to debate—does our policy communities still maintain the same independent foreign policy and national interest that Bangabandhu practiced and followed? Our ignorance of the past and the silence of the present will not protect our future.
Notes

1. Disclaimer: This paper has been written based on an article written by the author for the Independent University, Bangladesh.


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Mohammad Zahidul Islam Khan

1. Introduction

On 25 September 1974, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman delivered a historic speech at the 29th session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA). This was the first “strategic communication” by the Father of the Nation at the Assembly following the newly born country’s admission to the United Nations. Apart from the well-known and much-to-be-proud of fact that the speech was delivered in Bangla, the content of this speech stands out as a key document, begging to be studied and analyzed from an international relations (IR) perspective and the enduring ideals it contained. The speech, hailed as the “Magna Carta” of Bangladesh’s multilateral diplomatic principles, stands on the pillars of international peace and security based upon justice and economic emancipation. The chequered historical context and the importance attached to this widely quoted
document demand a systematic and evidence-based comparative analysis of the ideals outlined by Bangabandhu with Bangladesh’s practice of supporting global agendas. Thus, this paper seeks to answer: to what extent has Bangladesh remained seized in supporting the enduring ideals on key global issues enunciated by Bangabandhu in his speech at the United Nations in 1974? Answering this question entails: (i) content analysis to identify the key global issues and the enduring ideals outlined by Bangabandhu and; (ii) employing a benchmark to assess Bangladesh’s support to those ideals at the United Nations. The primary evidence to answer the research question is from Bangabandhu’s speech and Bangladesh’s contemporary voting records of 1,284 UNGA resolutions that were put to vote between 2001-2017 at the UNGA. The use of the UNGA voting records as a benchmark to compare the ideals begs justification. While a detail discussion on the relevance and suitability of the UNGA voting records is beyond the scope of this paper and can be found elsewhere, a brief mention of its nature could be useful.

The UNGA voting record is a product of the epistemic community. A majority vote on a resolution reflects a consensus on global norms at the Assembly. Nevertheless, the resolutions are also non-binding, hence regarded as “inconsequential” compared to the resolutions adopted in the Security Council. The voting preferences reflect member states’ choices on a global issue, at a point of time, on which the member state may or may not take actions. Most of the resolutions adopted at the UNGA are without a vote. Many that are put to vote are also routine and recurring in nature. The voting data of the 1,284 resolutions, used in this paper, were adopted in 1,873 plenary meetings between 2001-2017 (figure 1). The range of issues discussed at the plenary meetings, and the fact that the voting is a formal expression of member states’ opinion, makes the data meaningful, and the platform, a key source for global policy innovation, diffusion and norm socialization, albeit in a non-binding manner.
The Assembly is the hub for the proliferation and advancement of global norms on human rights, nuclear non-proliferation, disarmament, decolonization, democracy and developmental issues. Figure 2 depicts the broad categories and the subsets of the thematic issues of the 1,284 resolutions. Researchers have used the UNGA voting data to investigate dynamic state preferences, systemic polarity in the international system, foreign aid effectiveness, alliance building, probability of conflicts, "third world" solidarity and so on. The salience attached to different agendas and the member states' position on those issues, make the voting records a useful prism reflecting the "mind" of a member state. Thus, Bangladesh's voting records could be a useful prism to investigate the extant at which the country remained seized in supporting the ideals on key global issues enunciated by Bangabandhu in his speech at the United Nations.
The paper fills the void in extant literature by offering a systemic and evidence-based analysis, contrasting the practice of descriptive and impressionistic account of this historic speech. The paper is organized as follows. First, a brief context of Bangladesh’s birth and entry to the United Nations, highlighting the diplomatic wrangling in the Security Council regarding country’s membership bid followed by the global and domestic situation, is discussed. It helps us to better connect and comprehend the speech. Second, the content of the speech (the official record in English) is analyzed using an inductive method, to identify the policy guidance on key global issues and norms. It helps us to establish where Bangabandhu wanted the country to stand, supporting and advancing which global agendas. Following this, Bangladesh’s adherence to these ideals, such as, international peace and justice, human rights (HR.), disarmament, nuclear non-proliferation, economic emancipation, regional cooperation and so on, is traced by taking the country’s voting records on 1,284 UNGA resolutions. The later discussion is preceded by outlining the data sources and methodology used in this paper.
2. Bangladesh’s Entry to the United Nations

The birth of Bangladesh in 1971 is the only example of forcibly creating a new state propelled by ethnic-linguistic movement in the Cold War era. Amidst a juxtaposed position of the two superpowers, two successive Soviet vetoes at the Security Council facilitated Bangladesh’s birth. However, Bangladesh’s membership in the United Nations was not a straightforward issue. The country applied for the membership in August 1972. By the end of 1972, all global political powerhouses (except Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and China) and several international organizations had extended the courtesy of official recognition to Bangladesh; yet the Security Council did not recommend Bangladesh’s membership until 1974. This was the only exception in the Council’s history of processing membership applications between 1972-74. The lengthy discussions led to a vote on the “attitude” of members towards Bangladesh’s membership bid and culminated in tabling two additional draft resolutions alongside the “three-Power draft resolution” tabled by the Soviet Union, United Kingdom, India and Yugoslavia for Bangladesh’s immediate entry to the United Nations (see Table 1).

China (presumably on Pakistan’s behest) suggested to “postpone” Bangladesh’s membership. Citing the Council resolution 307 (1971), Assembly resolution 3793 (XXVI), and the Charter, China tabled a draft resolution to defer Bangladesh’s membership bid until the withdrawal of the Indian troops from Bangladesh and the release and repatriation of the prisoners of war. Although the Chinese draft resolution failed to obtain the required vote, China’s veto against three-Power draft resolution (S/10771) resulted in deferring Bangladesh’s entry to the United Nation. Interestingly, this was the first veto by China in the Security Council. In 1974, Bangladesh applied for “renewed consideration” of her membership. The 1776th Meeting of the Security Council recommended Bangladesh’s application and the country became the 136th member of the United Nation on 17 September 1974—paving the way for Bangabandhu’s historic speech at the Assembly later in the same month.
### Table 4(5).1 Security Council Voting Record on the Question of Bangladesh’s Admission to the UN in 1972

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Draft Resolution</th>
<th>In favour</th>
<th>Against</th>
<th>Abstention</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1660th Meeting of the Security Council on 25 August 1972</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S/10768 &amp; Corr. 1 (China) for postponement</td>
<td>China, Guinea, Sudan</td>
<td>India; USSR, Yugoslavia</td>
<td>Argentina, Belgium, France, Italy, Japan, Panama, Somalia, UK, U.S.A.</td>
<td>Not adopted. (failed to obtain nine affirmative votes).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S/10775 (Guinea, Somalia &amp; Sudan) for amendment</td>
<td>Guinea, Somalia, Sudan, U.S.A.</td>
<td>India, USSR, UK, Yugoslavia</td>
<td>Argentina, Belgium, China, France, Italy, Japan, Panama.</td>
<td>Not adopted. (failed to obtain nine affirmative votes).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S/10771 (India, USSR, UK, Yugoslavia) for immediate membership</td>
<td>Argentina, Belgium, France, India, Italy, Japan, Panama, USSR, UK, U.S.A. Yugoslavia</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>Guinea, Somalia, Sudan.</td>
<td>Not adopted, (negative vote being that of a permanent member).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Security Council, Official Record, S/PV-1660, pp. 7-10

From a global perspective, the United States and China the two P-5 members, insofar as their governments were concerned, had overtly opposed Bangladesh’s war of liberation. The post-World War II bipolar world system was a significant determinant of member state’s behaviour and political proximity in the global forum. The politics of the Cold War had a distinctive impact in South Asia. China viewed that the “Soviet socialist-imperialism” was playing the “most insidious role in South Asia” to further “control India and Bangladesh” and increase its “sphere of influence” in the Indian Ocean region. China viewed the Indo-Soviet treaty of peace, friendship and cooperation signed in August 1971 as an “aggressive military alliance”, that had stripped off India’s “cloak of non-alliance.”
Amidst the constant flux of the bipolar world, the non-aligned movement portended a change in the United Nation’s emphasis and approach to the world issues. The expansion of the non-aligned presence in the Assembly allowed space for the small states to operate as an active, independent agent, perhaps foreshadowing the displacement of balance-of-power politics by the Security Council and to cast off the role thrusted upon them as a “pawn” of the two superpowers.\textsuperscript{19}

The fight for self-determination was ongoing in many parts of the world, most notably in the Middle East and Africa. The period also witnessed the recurrence of global economic crises, triggered by the oil crisis and high inflations, culminating in the skyrocketing prices of food items and manufactured goods. The natural disasters and famine had exacerbated the plight of millions of people in many countries including Bangladesh. The war-ravaged Bangladesh was faced with the worst famine in decades that begun in March 1974 and ended in December of the same year and massive flooding along the Brahmaputra river resulting in high mortality.

In sum, the events leading to Bangabandhu’s speech at the Assembly in 1974 was quite chequered. The geopolitical context implied that the country’s “strategic communication” in the United Nations platform should be pragmatic, measured and at the same time bold against extant global injustice, discrimination and inequality. It needed to set out an inclusive and enduring diplomatic principle for the newly independent country that would facilitate translating the growing recognition of Bangladesh into pledge for material assistance by the global community to rebuild the country. As a pragmatist and astute statesman, Bangabandhu skilfully balanced all these aspects in his speech. His enduring policy guidance for charting Bangladesh’s engagements in the international arena is removed from the pretences and duplicity. It reflects his profound political acumen and wisdom to place the newly independent country as worthy equal amidst the power dynamics of a bipolar world system. Indeed, the speech stands out as the “Magna Carta” of Bangladesh’s multilateral diplomatic principles.\textsuperscript{20}

3. Data and Methodology
The mainstay of the data used in this paper is from the official records of relevant Security Council and General Assembly meetings, statements, speeches, voting records and resolutions. The data is retrieved from the
United Nations based websites, such as the Dag Hammarskjold Library and United Nations Digital library. Chapter VII of the *Repertoire of the Practice of the Security Council* contains the deliberations on and references to the question of membership by a newly independent country. The voting record on resolutions is obtained from *The Index to Proceedings of the General Assembly*, published each year by UN, Department of Public Information (UN DPI). The Index also provides the list of resolutions adopted by recorded or roll-call vote at the Assembly. The vote by each member state is recorded in the textual form such as Y (for “yes”), N (for “no”), A (for abstention) and “blank” indicating absence. Bangladesh’s voting data from 1975 is available. However, this paper uses Bangladesh’s voting record from the fifty-sixth session through the seventy-second session (2001-2017). Three interrelated factors support this period selection of the voting records for analysis. First, from an IR perspective, the events of 11 September, 2001 in the United States have ushered a new understanding and alignments of the members states, influencing their voting positions, most notably on terrorism and security related agendas. The period covered allows us to account for these changes, if any. Second, the member states’ voting preference is often influenced by the “regime in power, pressure and capacity”. During this selected period, the country was ruled by two major political parties and a caretaker government, allowing us to capture the variations, if any. Third, the sample voting record must be varied in nature to include different agendas allowing us to compare the policy ideals. The period (2001-2017) satisfies this condition as it is large enough to include country’s voting preferences on wide-ranging resolutions.

As mentioned in the introduction, the research question entails a qualitative content analysis followed by employing a benchmark to compare the policy ideals with the practices. An inductive method is used to analyze the content of the speech, focusing on the language intensity and similarity to classify the texts into an efficient number of thematic categories that represent similar ideas and meanings. Subsequently, the data on Bangladesh’s voting preference on UNGA Resolutions (2001-2017) is used to compare the country’s support to the specific ideals and thematic issues as derived by the inductive method.
4. Thematic Issues of Bangabandhu’s Speech

The speech contains overlapping themes, articulated in 95 sentences grouped under 23 paragraphs. A subjective interpretation of the sentences (excluding the pleasantries) through a systematic process of classification and quantification of similar themes results in identifying six key thematic issues and their number of occurrences (see Figure 3). The views on these issues help us to draw inference about where Bangabandhu wanted Bangladesh to stand, supporting which agendas and for what purpose and subsequently compare that with country’s voting records at the UNGA.

**Figure 4(5).3**  Content Analysis of Bangabandhu’s Historic Speech at the 29th Session of the UNGA, 1974 (Occurrences of Key Themes)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nature of text</th>
<th>Occurance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Peace/Justice/Peaceful Coexistence/Non-alignment/Multilateralism</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primacy of UN/Charter/Activities</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Rights/Rights for self-determination/Decolonisation/Discrimination</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic emancipation/Poverty/</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional Peace (Including with Pakistan)</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disarmament/Non-proliferation/Arms race</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


**International Peace, Justice and Foreign Policy Alignment**

The speech captures Bangabandhu’s profound wisdom and support for world peace. He viewed peace as the "deepest aspirations" of mankind, an "imperative for the survival" which must be based on "justice" to endure and sustain. He believed in the principles of peaceful coexistence and of
friendship to all and malice towards none—a core thinking that remains the hallmark of Bangladesh’s foreign policy. Bangabandhu stressed that, only an environment of peace would enable Bangladesh (and other developing countries alike) to mobilize and concentrate national energies and resources in “combating the scourges of poverty, hunger, disease, illiteracy and unemployment.” His strong support for the non-aligned movement stemmed from his conviction that the movement is a powerful “forces of peace and progress.” Accordingly, he wanted Bangladesh to avoid being the object in a political tug of war in the bipolar system. He envisioned a position for Bangladesh in which the country will stand along all nations of the world as worthy equals. His vision remains relevant in South Asia where two key regional powers are vying for keeping the smaller states, including Bangladesh, under their sphere of influence.

Figure 4(5)4 Bangladesh’s Voting Record in Peace & Security Issues

Source: Author’s compilation.
* Data includes resolutions where Bangladesh was present and voting.

Bangladesh’s adherence to the Father of the Nation’s pragmatism on global peace and justice can be traced in country’s voting records in the peace and security related resolutions at the UNGA (see figure 4). These resolutions propose the establishment of the zone for peace and cooperation, adherence to the law of the sea, territorial integrity of the member states, use of science and technology for international security and disarmament, etc. Out of the 72 such resolutions in which Bangladesh was present and voting, the country supported 69 resolutions (96 per cent)
with no opposition. The three abstention votes by Bangladesh relates to question of the unilateral declaration of independence of Kosovo (in 2008), territorial integrity of Ukraine (in 2013) and the withdrawal of foreign military forces from Moldova (in 2017). Beyond the voting records, Bangladesh’s leadership role in mooting the notion and steering the UNGA resolution on “Culture of Peace” and consistent contribution in the service of peace under the United Nations peacekeeping missions, attest country’s strong adherence to the enduring ideals enunciated by the Father of the Nation. Wearing blue helmets, a staggering 1,46,095 Bangladeshi peacekeepers have served in 54 peacekeeping operations around 40 countries. In sum, the voting records and actions by Bangladesh, including the supreme sacrifices made by the peacekeepers in the service of peace, tends to suggest that the country has continued to uphold its “total commitment to peace” as envisioned by the father of the nation.

Primacy of the United Nations

Bangabandhu viewed the United Nations as a noble platform through which the “aspiration of all men for peace and justice will be realized.” Described the United Nations as “man’s hope for the future”, he stated that the “noble ideals enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations are the very ideals for which millions of our [Bengali] people have made the supreme sacrifice” (italics added). By drawing such parallel between the Charter and the sacrifice of the Bengali people, he essentially highlighted the universal legitimacy of Bangladesh’s Liberation War. Attesting the United Nation’s contributions in the human progress, Bangabandhu acknowledged that, “there are few countries in the world that have a better realization than Bangladesh of the concrete achievements and potential for good of the Organization [i.e., UN].” Thus, it is not surprizing to see that Bangladesh’s Constitution (Art 25) states, “the State shall base its international relations on the principles of respect for national sovereignty and equality, non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries, peaceful settlement of international disputes, and respect for international law and the principles enunciated in the United Nations Charter...” In sum, the speech attests Bangabandhu’s staunch support for the United
Nations and its Charter. But how strongly has Bangladesh demonstrated her support towards the United Nations in recent years?

Figure 4(5). UNGA Voting Record of Bangladesh: 2001-2017

Source: Author’s compilation.

Data includes resolutions where Bangladesh was present and voting.

Bangladesh’s practice of supporting or opposing the UNGA resolutions can provide a practical insight in this regard. During the period of Bangladesh voted in 1,270 resolutions 2001-17 out of the total 1,284 resolutions that were tabled in the Assembly sessions. Figure 5 shows the session wise record of the Y/N/A votes by Bangladesh on these resolutions. Overall, Bangladesh agreed to 92 per cent of the resolutions, disagreed to only 2.75 per cent and abstained from voting in 5.19 per cent resolutions. The highest agreement (96 per cent) was in the 58th session while the maximum number of “no” votes (total 4) by Bangladesh was casted in the 62nd session. Be that as it may, the session-wise voting record clearly demonstrates Bangladesh’s high degree of support and confidence on the United Nations, attesting to the fact that Bangladesh has continued to view the platform as “man’s hope for the future”, envisioned by Bangabandhu.

Human Rights and Self-Determination

The speech registers Bangabandhu’s strong endorsement for the universal human rights and the rights for self-determination. As the iconic leader of a nation that has just come out of the shackles of oppression after a nine-
month long Liberation War, Bangabandhu strongly believed in the "powerful tides of self-determination" and pledged that his country should always stand firmly "by the side of the oppressed people of the world." Applauding the great victories by the people of Algeria, Vietnam and Guinea-Bissau, he boldly extended his support to the Arabs and the Palestinian people for their legitimate struggle for self-determination. Bangabandhu was a great believer in the Universal Declaration of HR. Citing the provisions of the Declaration, he stressed that "everyone everywhere should enjoy the economic, social and cultural rights indispensable for his dignity and the free development of his personality justice and equality." He also did not hesitate to tag the apartheid as a "crime against humanity" stating that it continues to "outrage the conscience of man". Noting the great advancement in the decolonization process, he applauded the "heroic people" of Zimbabwe and Namibia, engaged in their struggle for national liberation. Thus, it is expected that Bangladesh's voting preferences at the UNGA would reflect the enduring ideals of advancing the global human rights situation, the Palestinian cause, decolonization and democracy, as articulated by the Father of the Nation in his historic speech.

The HR, self-determination, decolonization, democratization and the Palestinian issues constitute around 50 per cent of the total resolutions that were put to vote at the Assembly between 2001-2017. The resolutions on Palestinian questions, and country-specific human rights situation dominates the HR category. These resolutions generally condemn the HR violation, discriminations and persecution by the member states and the non-state actors within those countries. The resolutions on advancing decolonization, democratization and human rights norms call for enhancing the effectiveness of the principle of self-determination, periodic and genuine elections and the rights of the women and children. Figure 6 depicts Bangladesh's voting record on these resolutions. Bangladesh supported all resolutions on the Palestinian rights—a clear testimony of adhering to the ideals set out by Bangabandhu. Bangladesh's opposition (i.e., no vote) regarding the advancement of HR resolutions relates to the provision of a moratorium on the use of the death penalty, an issue that the country is yet to reconcile like many other member states.
Bangladesh’s opposition (in 39 per cent resolutions) and abstention (in 51 per cent resolutions) in case of the country-specific HR resolutions tends to suggest that the country is strongly aligned with the ideals of “non-interference” while remaining shy to condemn several country-specific HR violations. However, such alignment needs to be viewed with two caveats. First, most freedom struggles in the 1970s were against the colonial/occupying powers and the HR abuse were by external powers or their sympathizers. Condemning the HR abuse by such colonial/occupying powers was an accepted global norm. In contrast, the contemporary HR abuses as recorded in the country-specific reports are often by the coercive apparatus of the state itself or the non-state actors within the state. Second, voting choice in resolutions on country-specific HR situations is politically sensitive as it risks being viewed as disrespecting the sovereignty and interfering into the internal affairs of a member state—particularly in case of a neighbour. The centrality of “non-interference” principle in regional politics and the “near-unanimous consensus” on this principle has become the corner stone of many Asian countries to maintain peace and stability. Thus, it is not surprising to see that Bangladesh is strongly aligned with the ideals of “non-interference”.
Economic and Developmental Issues

Bangabandhu envisioned a "just international economic order." In his speech, he talked about ensuring the most basic economic right for all—"the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and his family" and viewed this as a universal responsibility. He repeatedly emphasized the urgent need for the economic emancipation of the developing world. Being mindful of the fact that the world was facing great economic upheavals, he suggested the need for "marshalling the forces of reason, establishing a framework of international co-operation, ensuring the sovereignty of each State over its natural resources." To tackle the recurring natural disaster, Bangabandhu suggested "an institutional arrangement by which the international community can move effectively to meet and prevent such calamities." He suggested to strengthen the newly established Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Coordinator (UNDRO), realized later in 1992 by the United Nations.33

Figure 4(5).7 Bangladesh’s Voting Record in Economic & Developmental Issues

Source: Author’s compilation.
- Data includes resolutions where Bangladesh was present and voting.
He also did not hesitate to warn the world leaders that the failure to establish a just economic order would leave the world with an unparalleled legacy “of such human misery having to be endured by so many side by side with such unprecedented levels of affluence and prosperity enjoyed by so few.” His clarion call for human solidarity and brotherhood to regenerate the feeling of and an acknowledgement of interdependence transcends his time and has become much more relevant in the Covid-19 era. The voting records (Figure 7) reflect that, Bangladesh has consistently supported almost all resolutions on developmental and economic emancipation and advancement (95 per cent yes votes). Bangladesh’s position changed from opposing/abstaining (in 2012 and 2014) to supporting the resolution on “entrepreneurship for development” in 2016. The country has also changed her initial position from supporting the resolution on “agricultural technology for development” (in 2007) to “abstaining” in its subsequent occurrences.  

Regional Peace and Cooperation

From a regional perspective, Bangabandhu viewed the birth of Bangladesh as “materially contributing towards the creation of a structure of peace and stability” that could replace the past confrontation and strife with friendship and co-operation for the welfare of the region. He pledged that his country would continue to strive for good neighbourly relations with all, based on the principles of peaceful coexistence, respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, and non-interference in one another’s internal affairs.

Pursuant to his philosophy of regional peace, Bangabandhu expressed Bangladesh’s readiness to reconcile her relationship with Pakistan. He described the clemency granted to 195 Pakistani prisoners of war—accused of war crimes and crime against humanity, as an “investment towards the opening of a new chapter [with Pakistan] and towards the building of a future of peace and stability” in the subcontinent. As a humanist and pragmatists, he also mentioned the plight of the 63,000 stranded Pakistani families who reaffirmed their allegiance to Pakistan calling for their repatriation and a just division of the assets of former Pakistan.
Bangladesh’s adherence to the Father of the Nation’s pragmatism on regional peace and cooperation can be traced in country’s voting records of the relevant resolutions at the UNGA (see Figure 8). These UNGA resolutions calls for the promotion of multilateralism, confidence-building measures, respect for the right to universal freedom of travel, conventional arms control, south-south cooperation and enhancing the role of regional, subregional organizations and arrangements to consolidate democracy. In line with Bangabandhu’s enduring ideals, Bangladesh has consistently supported all such resolutions (100 per cent “yes” vote).

**Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament**

Bangabandhu emphatically stated the danger of arms race and nuclear weapons to mankind, calling for their total elimination. Warning that the world is “haunted by the fear of total destruction, threatened by nuclear war” he called upon the world leaders to build a “future free from the threat of nuclear war.” On disarmament issues, he called for taking “urgent measures to control the present arms race” to stop the “massive resources currently being wasted on armaments.” To him, the enemy of the mankind was “mass starvation”, “unemployment” and the “wretchedness of deepening poverty.” Instead of spending money in the arms race, Bangabandhu advocated for sharing the resources and technology on a *global scale* so that “men everywhere can begin to enjoy the minimal
conditions of a decent life” and realize the common good of mankind.

Bangladesh’s support to these ideals can be traced from her voting record on the disarmament & nuclear non-proliferation related resolutions – most of which were recurring in nature. Figure 9 depicts Bangladesh’s voting record on the 395 such resolutions that were put to vote between 2001-17. The evidence suggests that the country has consistently supported all such resolutions with three abstentions but no opposition. Bangladesh changed her position from “abstaining” to “supporting” the resolutions on The Hague code of conduct against ballistic missile proliferation and advancing multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations. The other abstention (in 2001) vote on the issue of “general and complete disarmament” relates to only one of the twenty sections of the resolution (A/RES/56/24). Overall, the voting record is indicative of Bangladesh’s strong adherence to the ideals set out by Bangabandhu.

Figure 4(5).9 Bangladesh’s Voting Record in Disarmament & Nuclear Non-proliferation Issues (% of ‘Y/N/A’ votes/session, n=395*)

Source: Author’s compilation.
* Data includes resolutions where Bangladesh was present and voting.

6. Conclusion

Forty-six years ago, Bangabandhu, in his first speech at the General Assembly outlined a set of enduring ideals for the new-born country. Bangabandhu’s ideals were pragmatic, universal and bold with a vision to position Bangladesh in the international stage as a peace-loving country
and worthy equal. These ideals included respecting universal human rights, rights for self-determination, peaceful co-existence, disarmament, non-proliferation, multilateralism and establishing a just international economic order. This paper investigated the question: to what extent has Bangladesh remained seized supporting the enduring ideals on key global issues enunciated by Bangabandhu in his speech at the United Nations? The paper used Bangladesh's voting records at the UNGA for the period 2001-17 to trace country's adherence to the ideals.

The paper has revealed that, except for the politically sensitive country-specific human rights issues, Bangladesh continued supporting Bangabandhu's ideals with remarkable consistency in all thematic categories (between 92-100 per cent "yes" votes). Bangabandhu's emphasis on the primacy of the United Nations to build a peaceful and just world, non-alignment, peaceful co-existence, economic emancipation and global solidarity has become much more relevant in the Covid-19 era and the current geopolitical context of South Asia. The paper opens new avenues to conduct evidence-based research on the policy ideals and its practices. The methodology used in this paper can be expanded beyond the voting records to analyze Bangladesh's adbrace and actions on each thematic issue by employing appropriate proxy variables, derived from the domestic and external context. Such scholarly studies could be a valuable tribute to the legacy of the Father of the Nation in his birth centenary year.
Notes

1 Bangabandhu (the friend of Bengal) is the honorific attested to the Father of the Nation by the people of Bangladesh. At the General Assembly, President of the 2243rd Plenary Meeting also invited him to deliver the speech as “His Excellency Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman”, attesting the universal recognition of the honorific. See Official Records, A/PV.2243, Address by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Prime Minister of Bangladesh, United Nations General Assembly, Twenty-Ninth Session, 2243rd Plenary Meeting, 25 September 1974, p. 159.

2 The purpose of strategic communication in the politics and international relations context is to “build political consensus or consent on important issues involving the exercise of political power and the allocation of resources.” At the international level, this includes communications in support of public diplomacy and military stabilization. See also, Kirk Hallahan, Derina Holtzhausen, Betteke van Ruler, Dejan Verčič and Krishnamurthy Sriramesh, “Defining Strategic Communication”, *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 2007, p. 8. For an analysis of how strategic communications in politics differ or seeks a way around at least some of the ethical and moral constraints also see, Mervyn Frost and Nicholas Michelsen, “Strategic Communications in International Relations: Practical Traps and Ethical Puzzles”, *Defence Strategic Communications*, Vol. 2, Spring 2017, pp. 15-16.


4 For a detailed analysis on whether a country’s voting preferences at the UNGA can be a useful way to understand its policy inclinations, see aho Mohammad Zahidul Islam Khan, “Is Voting Patterns at the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) a Useful Way to Understand a Country’s Policy Inclinations: Bangladesh’s Voting Records at the UNGA”, *SAGE Open*, Vol. 10, No. 4, 2020, pp. 1-16.

5 The epistemic communities are a principal channel by which consensual knowledge about causal understandings is applied to international policy coordination and by which states may learn through processes of international cooperation. See also, Peter M. Haas, “Epistemic Communities”, in Bertrand Badie, Dirk Berg-Schlosser and Leonardo Morlino (eds.), *International Encyclopaedia of Political Science*, Thousand Oaks, Calif: SAGE, 2011, p. 2.
The UNGA voting may not be taken as an exact proxy of foreign policy. A foreign policy consists of decisions and actions. See also, AS Bojang, “The Study of Foreign Policy in International Relations”, *Journal of Political Sciences & Public Affairs*, Vol. 6, No. 4, 2018, p. 1.


From a Cold War perspective, the United States viewed that a unified Pakistan would better serve the developing Sino-US relationship to contain the Soviet Union. Others Western states did not want to endorse the Indian intervention in Bangladesh for fear that it could incite similar situations in many other countries. See also, Craig Baxter, *Bangladesh: From a Nation to a State*, United States: Westview Press, Harper Collins, 1997, pp. 145–148; Harry Blair, “Civil Society, Democratic Development and International Donors”, in Rounaq Jahan (ed.),

11 Soviet veto gave the precious time required for a swift military offensive by the Indians.


13 The membership process involves a recommendation by the Council’s Committee for Admission of New Member State, acted upon at the UNGA. The Indian representative at the Council presented a tabulated account of the time taken by the Committee to recommend the membership applications made by other countries, stressing that “since the thaw in the cold war, there has been no delay whatsoever in disposing of any application for membership.” See Official Record, S/PV-1660, Admission of New Members, United Nations Security Council, Twenty Seventh Year, 1660th Meeting, New York, p. 4; Also see, United Nations, “Practice Relative to Recommendations to the General Assembly Regarding the Membership in the United Nation”, in The Repertoire of the Practice of the Security Council (1972-1974), New York: United Nations, 1974, p. 73, available at https://www.un.org/en/sc/repertoire/72-74/72-74_07.pdf/, accessed on 03 October 2020.

14 Voting on the attitude of members on membership bid does not constitute a substantive decision. China, Somalia and Sudan abstained while Guinea opposed. See official document, S/10774, Note by the President of the Security Council (Concerning Admission to UN Membership), United Nations Security Council, 23 August 1972, p. 93.

15 The Chinese representative also stated that Bangladesh’s membership bid “runs entirely counter to the principles of the Charter and is totally untenable from a legal point of view.” See Official Record, S/PV-1660, op. cit., p. 8. In a letter to the Secretary-General, the permanent representative of India repeated the Indian Foreign Minister’s assurance that the “Indian troops will not be in Bangladesh a day longer than necessary.” See also, S/10501 dated 11 January 1972, p.1.


17 See Official Record, S/11316, Report of The Security Council Committee on The Admission of New Members Concerning the Application of The People’s Republic


The NAM sprung from the unilateral act of a state “declaring itself independent of the predominating spheres of international influence”. It formally came into being through the signing of a joint declaration by Egyptian president Nasser, Indian Prime Minister Nehru, and Yugoslav president Tito in 1956. For an illuminating account of the emergence of NAM see, Radoslav Stojanovic, “The Emergence of the Non-Aligned Movement: A View from Belgrade, Case Western Reserve”, Journal of International Law, Vol. 13, No. 3, 1981, pp. 443-450.


From the years 1946-2007, each supplement to the Repertoire is organized into twelve chapters. From 2008 onwards, each supplement is organized into ten parts.


For an illuminating account of Bangabandhu’s speech at the fourth Summit of Heads of State/Government of the Non-aligned countries held in Algiers in September 1973 see also, AKM Atiqur Rahman, “Bangabandhu in Algiers for Non-aligned Summit”, The Daily Sun, 03 September 2020, available at https://


Bangladesh was one of the 74-member states who abstained from voting on this resolution.

Bangladesh was one of the 58-member states who abstained from voting on this resolution.

Bangladesh was one of the 83-member state who abstained from voting on this resolution.


The very first proposal co-sponsored by Bangladesh after her admission to the UN was that of including the question of Palestine in the agenda of the General Assembly. See Official Record, A/PV.2262, Twenty-Ninth Session, 2262nd Plenary Meeting, Speech by Mr. Hossain (Bangladesh), United Nations General Assembly, 09 October 1974, p. 589.


UNDRO ceased to exist when incorporated into the UN Department of Humanitarian Affairs, set up in April 1992, currently, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).
34 The recurring resolution on agricultural technology for development was put to vote six times between 2007-17. Bangladesh supported the resolution in 2007 but abstained in subsequent occurrences.

35 These resolutions call for achieving the universality of the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT), devising effectively verifiable treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosives, design disarmament and non-proliferation education and training programme to promote a culture of non-violence and peace.

36 This recurring resolution was put to vote seven times between 2004-2017. Bangladesh abstained from voting in 2004 but supported the resolutions in all subsequent occurrences.

37 This recurring resolution was put to vote six times at the UNGA between 2012-2017. Bangladesh abstained in 2012 but voted yes in all subsequent occurrences.

38 Resolution on general and complete disarmament (A/RES/56/24) contains 22 sections (24A to 24 V). Bangladesh supported all other sections.