Alliance Reliability in the Post-Cold War Context and Bangladesh Military Strategy

Muhammad Shahiduzzaman

In the post-Cold War search for global order, most of the active participants in the international system are confronted with new incentives to redefine their security premises, both economic and military. No longer are the images of a Cold War setting based on a strictly bi-polar global military balance and a multipolar political order, considered realistic in the search for security prerogatives, specially after the termination of the Soviet state, the latter in effect forcing the sudden collapse of one of the very durable pillars which had been preserving systemic stability.

Consequently, a new structure of potential systemic instability appears imminent with symptoms of a partial break-down of post-War national boundaries in East Europe, which, unless it is contained during the transitional stage, could at its worst, unleash a global spill-over trend and an inevitable turn to an anarchic world order. Alan Henrikson addresses the issue with a prescription: “The challenge facing the world community in 1992 and beyond is to establish a system of collective action for peace and security that significantly increases the chances of avoiding another break-down of order capable, like Iraq’s seizure of Kuwait in August 1990, of arresting the normal activities of most of mankind. The ‘old order’ of rivalry and revenge should be succeeded by a ‘new order’ of reciprocity and reconciliation. But if, in particular situations, such concord does not arise naturally, then international regulation (implemented by force if other means fail or are believed likely to prove inadequate) must be relied upon in order to assure peace and security among nations”

In this transitional phase, global disputes can hardly be rationalized any more on the basis of the Cold War equilibrium since international systemic linkages at the sub-systemic level cannot be simplified any longer by applying the superpowers'-determined ‘ally-adversary’ configuration. On the other hand, Alan Henrikson suggests: “The remarkable and truly historic events of the late 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s have changed our assessment of whether or not a cooperative order of nations, including a workable regime for collective security, might be possible. The disappearance of the Cold War dividing line between eastern and western Europe made a comprehensive resolution of many other international problems thinkable”.

The concept of military strategy in the present post-Cold War global setting has to reckon with a whole new set of variables that were inapplicable in Cold War strategy formulation. The Cold War-oriented alliance structure of the past had its own clearly-demarcated and well-entrenched premises of capability-fixation. Even the countries that had led the Nonaligned Movement could be effectively demarcated in terms of regime-sympathy or bilateral security linkages with either of the superpowers. But now, national military strategies need to be redefined, specially in the Third World context, India and Pakistan being two excellent examples. They need to redefine their positions through an appreciation of the specific nature of changing orientations in global economics-biased groupings, altered notions of unipolarity in American foreign policy, images of Third World threat-perceptions construed by the USA from time to time based on either nuclear proliferation prospects or rise of fundamentalist creeds, Islamic or whatever. But by far, the more important demands on military strategy involve a rising trend of contradictions on the question of modern day ‘state-nation’ dichotomy. These state-nations see themselves as being free from any external threat psychosis much due to a gradual termination of the practice of expansionism as state ideology within the present closely-monitored structure of global systemic structure. Yet, internal trends of secession based on sub-nationalist aspirations and a global proliferation of an increasing number of adherents involved in refining the right of self-determination as in the
already broken-up erstwhile Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, and the potentially breakable states of Kashmir and Punjab in India, as well as several other possible future cases like Burma, Czechoslovakia, Poland and Sri Lanka — all these reveal fresh dilemmas for the relatively stable post-World War II concepts of gradually-evolving approaches to military strategy. The critical question is — can force be an answer to such altered premises of nationalist aspirations backed by popular support?

This paper seeks to raise the critical question further beyond the initial reality and extend it on to the realm of alliance reliability posing a great deal of uncertainty for contemporary military strategy. The paper picks up on Bangladesh from a partial security perspective in the South Asian context and the research findings hopefully aim at drawing conclusive evidence to the effect that alliances of the Cold War nature based on long-term security configurations are now a thing of the past and that rather short-term ad-hoc coalitions based on concrete and fluctuating interest-perceptions are the more realistic choices for the future. The paper seeks to make the point that the pursuit of national security in military strategy requires that all eggs ought not to be placed in the same basket and that statehood is a dynamic process, evolving and altering with the changing needs of time and that military strategy, in the Bangladesh case at least, should look out for long-term changed premises of statehood.

In the post-Cold War global setting, the possibility of a new trend of state-boundary redetermination as a domino-effect of East European changes creates complications for military strategy for not only the super-power U.S.A. but also for the state-nations as well. If military strategy in the past was based on the very basic function of protecting valid or imposed national boundaries and had to that effect been dependent on alliance reliability, the complex question that consequently arises is — whether military strategy can in future afford to ignore the erosion of state-centric patriotism and then turn on to recognise the validity of long-subdued populist sentiments even if they are based on the premises of democratic self-determination prerogatives, as in the erstwhile Soviet Union and Yugoslavia and as a contrast to it, as in Burma and Kashmir, with imposed systems. While extending the applicability of military strategy
to the domestic realm, it may be pertinent to ask in the present
global context—at what point can military strategy afford to
reverse its most severe traditional role—i.e., force people within
a state-nation not to commit to a gradually-assumed faith and
adherence to revised premises of self-determination or long-
held, suppressed faith to such psychology, e.g., the case of
German-speaking people of a known former part of Germany
which had been ceded to Poland as a post-War pay-off, thus
denying those people the right to regain unified Germany.

Modern military strategy is largely a product of post-World
War II arrangements which have rationalized the concept of
territorial defense by developing essential linkages with the
preservation of autonomous military structures as the basic
means for such defense. Military strategies in the Third World
context have mostly involved a mixture of standardized Western
concepts applied in the tradition of a colonial-origin armed
forces formation and extending to the modern-day adjustments
as demanded by the premises of statehood. The latter would
involve the question of determining military strategy on the
basis of available and usable military technology including the
quality and types of weaponry, their range, diversity and
applicability in terms of defending the specific character of the
territory involved, the nature of external threat, the education
and training of available military manpower, and all other
related tactical detail aimed at updating the art of warfare.
Military strategy can never overlook geopolitical compulsions
and while the available overall means generate the material
strength of the military, its operational behaviour has primarily
relied on the formulation of a realistic strategy that would
maximize performance within the means.

South Asian premises of military strategy have continued to
rely more on Western strategic thinking although the regional
setting may have demanded innovative alterations responding
to the future demographic pressures on scarce land that would
almost certainly demand territorial readjustments for survival
of statehood. Over the years, the gradual conversion of military
technology in terms of updating and improving the efficiency
level has had profound effects on changing notions of strategy
and tactics. Limits in armaments quality obviously impose
harsh constraints on planning. The paper aims at this point to
relate the above-mentioned theoretical postulations in the context of the geo-military strategic realities confronting Bangladesh with an aim to formulate certain generalizations leading to a futuristic fusion of military strategy and foreign policy.

As it is, there is very little openly available literature, specially in a comprehensive form, on a viable blueprint for Bangladesh’s military strategy, the type that may allow an analyst to propose definite critical views in formulating altered premises to adjust with the changed global realities. Because of the manner in which the military structure projects itself in smaller, resource-poor states like Bangladesh, one has to rely on much restricted, narrowly-focused choices in perceiving any viable framework of military strategy compared with the dynamism, openness, flexibility and projected aims in the military strategies of more powerful states, including even India. The lack of resources imposes a compelling limit on weapons procurement even of the recently obsolete category not to mention the question of state of the art weapons in a world of greater accuracy-seeking military technology. This reality clearly undermines viable strategic planning.

Considering Bangladesh, there is nothing much except the availability of potentially abundant military manpower which may however serve to construct a limited alternate strategy. One could also argue that with the given nature of terrain, the climatic conditions, the ideal stretches of flat lands, water routes and related sets of peculiarities, a specific context for a military strategy does exist, primarily dependent on the optimum use of cheap manpower. But these are still arguably minor elements compared to the essential goals of a survival-seeking positive strategy which in essence must primarily involve the option of alliance reliability as a foreign and defense policy objective.

In the post-Cold War global setting, an altered framework of military strategy must be relinked with the pursuit of enlightened foreign policy goals reflected through geo-political compulsions as well as extra-territorial, opportunity-seeking long-term survival instincts that may help promote balanced changes in our premises of statehood over time as an integral phenomenon of the transitional nature of the system itself. While applying the above-mentioned contention upon
Bangladesh, her ability to survive the next half-a-century or so with an explosive population figure within the next twenty years, definitely demands the type of military strategy for survival that may optimize security options based on flexible premises of alliance reliability, particularly with such forces that may be meaningfully supportive of an expansionist option for us eastwards, where the state structure has always been very weak and vulnerable and will bear the prospect of disintegration in future just like Yugoslavia. The utopia of today does carry a lot of the compulsions of nature as well as historical rationale, to demand some serious attention in futuristic military strategy unless one totally abhors the “no-risk-no gain philosophy” and chooses to blissfully succumb to the unknown hands of the realities of the future, something one could help shape or ignore.

Alliance-building process is often an integral part of foreign policy that concentrates on security and survival. But the question of alliance reliability is often a sensitive proposition linked greatly to the value-loaded question of interpreting the politico-military rewards emanated thereof, as well as, economics-biased incentives that contribute to regime-survival along with meaningful aid-accommodation. Alliance-biased notions of military strategy has practically nothing to do with the interpretation of the puritanist ideal of non-alignment. Most of the current trends of non-aligned behaviour clearly acknowledge the freedom of external alliance choices. The death of the Cold War nullifies whatever restrictive psychology may have defined the Movement in terms of joining the superpowers’ defense treaties most of which are now non-existent. Alliance practice does not even have to involve formal written commitment, when the depth of interests dominate the question of alliance reliability.

In many ways, the 25-year Indo-Bangladesh Friendship Treaty is a fascinating example of an actual survival-seeking military strategy at least for the period covering the formative phase of state-preservation of Bangladesh. Gradually, the Treaty turned into a more enduring mechanism to reduce the likelihood of expensive damage-potential from inevitable sources despite the argument that it had failed to serve our interests. Surely enough, the continuation of the Treaty was
positively used by consequent ruling regimes to promote their survival interests not just before the 1975 change-over, but much more efficiently so, well after 1975 as well. It may be proposed that the pre-1975 political regime faced an unduly high political stereo-typing and a ruthless domestic criticism whereas the very existence of that Treaty had gained for Bangladesh a very clear and articulate recognition of her statehood by India. This was a blessing for such a nascent state and because of it, no subsequent extra-legal relations could subsequently be imposed in a manner that Nepal, Sri Lanka or Bhutan were subjected, with the excuse of strategic or security-minded Indian defense planning.

The Indo-Bangladesh Treaty had not been altogether a document for captivity in the sense that it provided a legal framework for evolving Indo-Bangladesh relations whereby, the weaker party could use time as breathing space — in order to gradually widen the base for seeking allies in the Muslim world and the West, while at the same time, applying diplomatic persuasion on India in order to desist the latter from any military intervention following the violent changeover in 1975. The mutual loyalty syndrome, penned down in the Treaty itself, in terms of security and defense cooperation or at least the ritualistic pretensions of such cooperation which were routinely parroted by successive regimes taking over power in Bangladesh by-passing the electoral process in the seventies and eighties, had perhaps served to an amazing extent in contributing to some form of tolerance-behaviour on the part of India, thus helping each successive Bangladesh government to exercise foreign policy flexibility at a much higher level than perhaps Sri Lanka or Nepal in comparable situations. One may thus choose not to simply cite negative aspects of such a Treaty without considering whether the ill-effects could be even more profound in the absence of a Treaty. Certainly Bangladesh’s perceived military strategy of alliance reliability has not been devoid of alternatives simply because the Treaty existed. The fact that a consistent working level of security partnership did actually grow and continue to survive with China, Pakistan, the Islamic and the Western group of states in a limited form despite the somewhat restricting character of the Treaty itself, does mean that the Treaty had not spoilt operational choices for the
weaker partner by imposing limits on the flexible search for alliance-durability or weapons-transactions relationships.

Military strategy for Bangladesh would have to continue to rely on seeking friendly international support from a core-base of reliable security partners even if they belong to distant shores. If this is an impossibility, the trappings of the Treaty will need to be manipulated and some arrangements will have to be worked out as the Treaty expires in the mid-nineties. On the other hand, there are many possible directions of change in future versions of military strategy in the small state context due to the highly uncertain nature of transformations which could occur in global security structure following shifts in perceptions on international security on the part of the only emerging guardian in a unipolar global setting—the U.S.A. Certain findings by several scholars in the field of strategy help to draw up a remarkable range of propositions in future conflict-patterns. Despite the end of the Cold War, regional conflicts will continue to involve the use of force and warfare would be a favoured instrument to the extent as Robert O’Neill (1988) suggests, that force is often the only means available for resolving a problem, mostly for Third World states.\(^3\) John Chipman thinks that even for the U.S., there can be no easy coherence in terms of military strategy that would apply to confront the Third World when compared to the Cold War itself. Chipman (1991) adds that locally-determined internal political and social influences could define the direction of Third World politics and security policies unlike ever before in the past.\(^4\) If the end of the bi-polar world order or super-power competition is looked as a signal for translating into an increased level of regional instability, this may result from the realignment of regional balances of power with many Third World states trying to articulate their ideological re-education following the fall of the Soviet Union. With the end of the Cold War, it will be increasingly unlikely for Bangladesh, based on the proposed strategic projections worldwide, to gain any relevance for American strategic utility.

Stephen Van Evera (1990), representing the neo-realist school of thought, argues that even with the passing of the geopolitical rationale for containment, interests in Europe are sufficiently compelling to warrant continued U.S. troop
presence in Europe to support collective efforts toward maintaining stability and dampen any emerging tendencies toward nationalism and militarism. But recent events in Yugoslavia have hardly brought about any NATO interference to serve such a purpose. For the Third World, Van Evera finds no U.S. need for continuing or expanding its "already deep" involvement. He considers such themes as 'balance of power' or 'intervention promotes democracy and human rights' invalid arguments during the Cold War and even more so now. He argues that such interventions are infeasible and would fail to produce democracy even if militarily successful. America's current rejection of democratic Iran and the strategic commitment to Mid-East monarchies certainly contradict Van Evera's prescriptions. However, there is the other school of thought called the neo-internationalists' who "maintain that the Third World has been and will remain central to U.S. strategic interests either because it contributes directly to the external power of a superpower or because dealing with the Third World establishes the credibility that helps superpowers to defend their vital interests elsewhere." Michael Desch critiqued (1989) both the neo-realists and the neo-internationalists and offered the third view that intrinsic and extrinsic values ought to decide strategic involvement. Geographically proximate areas to the U.S. are defined as extrinsically valuable while certain identifiable parts of the Third World, beyond Western Europe, namely, Northeast Asia and the Persian Gulf are intrinsically valuable. To defend the latter, the three intrinsically valued regions identified are, the Caribbean, the littoral of the Indian Ocean and a base in the Western Pacific. Based on this perspective, India somehow gains a marginal strategic utility but West Asia is exactly the area of prime interest.

Robert Art (1991) in a more recent study, cites five strategic interests for the U.S.: defense, preservation of prosperity based on international economic openness, assured access to Persian Gulf oil, prevention of certain wars and, when feasible, promotion of democratic institutions and certain human rights values. Samuel Huntington cites (1991) three principal strategic interests: the U.S.A. maintaining itself as the premier world power meaning countering Japanese economic challenge,
preventing the emergence of a political-military hegemonic power in Eurasia and protecting concrete interests in the Third World. Huntington argues that U.S. strategy may disregard deterring threats since there are none and instead preserve equilibrium in Europe and Asia.

American scholarly forecasts regarding future scenarios in our region are noteworthy. Geoffrey Kemp has argued (1990) that "the shift toward a more geo-economic train of strategic thought must acknowledge that the complex dynamics of economic development and accompanying economic disequilibriums will have a negative impact on the security of the developing world." John Chipman's observation has some relevance in South Asia: "The fracturing process underway in a number of states under pressure from separatist movements has proven to be less than peaceful. High population growth rates coupled with limited economic opportunities and widespread political discord in the Third World foster cross-border migration." "Border disputes, economic dislocation, cultural and religious strife, and political conflict will be the most likely result of the movement of large numbers of refugees and immigrants across borders", speculates Yezid Sayigh.

While reviewing the comparative military literature in the post-Cold War context, Fetter (1991) and McCain (1991) maintained: "Analysis of third world militaries has centered not on the unquantifiable characteristics of regional armies—leadership, morale, small-unit effectiveness, and combined armed operations—but what has become a fairly repetitive recitation of the build-up of increasingly capable military arsenals in the developing world." But as Cohen and Edward Luttwak (1990) argue: "The ability of Third World states to procure advanced military equipment is not commensurate with their ability to wage modern war. In areas of operational command, maintenance, and tactical leadership, they fall short of the standards required to field an effective combined armed force." Stephen Peter Rosen (1982) and James Dunn (1990) contributed immensely with discussions of levels of professionalism, experience and leadership of Third World armies, but their work would need to be followed up by continuous monitoring of future trends for any meaningful study of strategy. American worries regarding mid-ranking
powers in the Third World constitute states which are clearly located in the near proximity of Bangladesh and are capable of manipulating her territorial integrity as a strategy of extraterritorial security. To that extent thus, American worries have even greater meaning for us. However, Thomas McNaugher (1990) argues that there is a tendency to exaggerate the effectiveness of certain weapons in Third World arsenals like the ballistic missiles and chemical weapons, which in fact promotes proliferation and tends to heighten instability in an already volatile region. While their strategic effectiveness cannot be denied, McNaugher sees these as useful only as political instruments. Considering the destabilizing consequences of nuclearization in South Asia, Bangladesh has more reasons than other states to reckon with such realities in her military strategy.

Bangladesh lacks any ability to nurture sophisticated weapons, aimed at formulating a viable military strategy that would ensure territorial defense in order to confront any hypothetical threat from the larger neighbours, namely India or Burma. India imposes geopolitical constraints of a higher magnitude because of locational facts, territorial depth and its presence upto the deeper reaches of the Bay of Bengal matched by designs to launch a blue-water navy. India has no expansionist designs on Bangladesh except for occasional encroachments into disputed territorial frontiers, mostly confined to the maritime belt consisting of the emerging islands of the Bay. The Hill Tracts in the southeast which Bangladesh inherited as a result of the Radcliffe Award did not become a bone of contention since India had made no claims on these once the partition was consolidated after 1947. In fact, the former Pakistan state in 1947 had not only neglected the prospects for the annexation of Tripura where the Maharaja was willing to accede to Pakistan, but then, much to India’s relief, no effort was even made to revive claims on united Assam, although the provisions of the Lahore Resolution and most other subsequent developments had offered de-facto legitimacy to such claims. The boundaries formulated during the Partition of Bengal in 1905 had been ignored in 1947 despite the fact that powerful geopolitical factors and a comparative global criteria of boundary demarcation would fully justify the amalgamation of
Assam and Bengal as a single political entity. Currently however, Bangladesh serves as the crucial strategic corridor to enable India to maintain her sound military grip in that region befaced with perpetual insurgency.

On the other hand, Bangladesh has to confront the new Burmese reality through a cautious projection of military strategy within her limited means. So far, there is no visible serious policy to confront unanticipated Burmese military threats or excursions in this land. There seems to be a terrible lack of agreeable consensus on foreign and defense policy coordination in this vital area. The passive nature of foreign policy clearly indicates an obsession towards appeasement. Consequently, the Burmese side has thrust an alarming set of aggressive policies which in response require the revised formulation of calculated strategic reconsiderations. There has not yet been any policy on this side to encounter foreign refugee influx in a manner so that it could be envisioned beyond simple humanitarian proportions and be disallowed from attaining the magnitude of a demographic invasion. The entire experience of uncalled-for security impositions emanating from repressive policies, i.e., lack of democratic practise in the eastern neighbourhood, leading to a colossal spill-over into this utterly crowded country, is almost as severe as an invasion. It is doubtful whether any strategic posture has at all been considered that would sanctify tactical deployments in order to restrict the consequences of the insurgency in a "pariah" state like Burma, literally exposed before the entire civilized world. Refugees influx in current times has in many ways turned into a forbidden act even in Western democracies because such an onrush based on humanitarian premises have often involved overwhelmingly disproportionate challenges for a receiving state, being dependent on its survival instincts for self-preservation and stability. Boat people from Vietnam were denied subsequent entry by southeast Asian democracies and recently, Albanian and Bosnian refugees were literally pushed back by their European neighbours even in the face of genocide prospects for the former.

The rationale for the above is very pragmatic as much as it admittedly appears unkind but then as long as the international political community chooses to ignore the problem conveniently
and avoids coercive action against the crisis-creating source state, there may be little choice for any such luxury for a state already bedevilled with economic squeeze, to be able to act as a permanent host. Burma has not only launched a policy of demographic invasion but has almost succeeded in imposing chains on Bangladesh to dissuade her from extending moral support to the democratic uprising in that land as well as to promote self-determination for the Arakanese. Foreign policy seems to indicate no supportive role for a military strategy that might help contemplate dealing with Burma on equal terms.

In this particular situation, the question of alliance reliability is vital in order to work out a respectable resolution of a deep-seeded credibility gap in Burmese dealings of the minority issue. The dilemma is comparable to Israel’s security quests vis-à-vis her Arab neighbours, where the U.S. has a crucial role to play in order to maintain Israel’s upper hand in military strategic policies as well as for diplomatic bargaining. But there is just no way that Bangladesh could acquire such alliance utility to a super-power as Israel has earned. Whatever is possible, has been the result of a slow process of diplomatic persuasion and that too, with an inconsistent pace — as the very current agonising reality of the Rohyngya refugees, inhabiting the land would amply prove. The influence of China and Japan, as well as the Western states have only worked marginally so far. Foreign policy leadership has been a colossal failure — much more severely in the democratic set-up than ever before. India has almost been placed into a hands-off position despite the compelling reality of an Indo-Bangladesh Treaty on paper that could at the very least allow India to offer a friendly stand of moral support to Bangladesh and some degree of condemnation of Burma that may not have cost her much based on her past official policy of open disapproval of the military rule in Burma. Perhaps India has been conscious of Bangladeshi sensitivities on this matter. Besides, Indian preference for the bilateral approach was duly appreciated and it was a prudent choice to keep India out of Bangladesh’s bilateral dispute with the only other bordering state, since, any Indian involvement could include a price tag, which any government here would perhaps diligently prefer to avoid. The recent Sino-Indian dialogue at the Defense Ministers’ level would indicate that
India has her own designs.

The dilemma of alliance reliability is so acute that this country can never afford to construct any military strategy based on offensive warfare, the way Israel has been able to afford. But then, neither is defense a very viable strategy with a total lack of modern weaponry. Alliance reliability is essentially applicable for any meaningful security against territorial violations including the Burmese example of open disregard of international law based on a policy to annihilate minorities. Our search for a defense ally has hardly succeeded in gaining much from the Muslim-majority states and as a consequence, whatever military strategy is shaped has to primarily rely on the international system and its instruments to safeguard her prospects of sovereign survival. In this regard, Alan Henrikson’s recent work on ‘Vision of A New World Order’ captures the Bangladesh dilemma very aptly: “As the military strength needed to maintain regional security will be mostly in the hands of the major states of each region, their military power must be adequate to deter or repel aggression. At the same time, this military power should not be so great or unevenly distributed in a region so as to threaten the stability of the region and heighten anxiety there. Regional organisations, therefore, must take responsibility for providing, by a spreading of power and responsibility, what has been termed ‘equitable security’ for all the states in such spheres.”

Henrikson’s prescription in the above context is useful: “The United Nations’ interest in regional action for peace and security was considerably heightened by the reality that, with the onset of the Cold War, the U.N. Security Council became veto-bound. In the aftermath of the Gulf crisis, which exhibited the possibilities and the need for more inter-organizational collaboration, the thinking that lay behind these original U.N. Charter regional provisions should be reactivated. It would be important however, not to emphasize the role of NATO, the NEU, or some other organization to the extent that it pre-empted the central role of the universal body, the U.N. The ‘dilemma of regionalism’ is knowing how ‘to coalesce the parts without fragmenting the whole.”

In the post-Cold War transition, secure alliance commitment is almost too uncertain, as was the case of Syria.
supporting the U.S. action against Iraq as opposed to Jordan's neutral role despite clear credentials as a U.S. ally. Ad-hoc coalitions appear to be a more likely trend rather than long-term alliance reliability. Don Snider and Gregory Grant quite strongly argue in a recent article: "The distinction between the familiar concept of collective security and coalition warfare is clear. Collective security agreements rely on the coordination of common interests, the codifying of commitments and responsibilities, and provision for an integrated command structure. In regional conflicts, differing policy aims, inevitable in a collection of states, cast into jeopardy the concept of collective security. The requirement that states in a collective security arrangement surrender highly valued national autonomy to a collective good is particularly distasteful to a developing nation." 17 This view explains the coalition structure in the Gulf War. Substantiating further, Robert Art (1991) clearly explains why limits of collective security can fail to ensure the security guarantee for a small state that lacks superpower strategic utility. He suggests: "Collective security systems can dissuade aggression only if all member states pledge in advance to punish any aggressor state for its aggression regardless of its identity. This requirement has all but ensured that effective examples of collective security are rare, and that they have been most successful historically only against the most bellicose and aggressive states that threaten much weaker states or, as in the case of the erstwhile Soviet Union, against a persistent and recognizable threat. The union of Arab states attempting to present a unified front against Israel is an example of the constant and unending strife and indecision that is a prevailing characteristic among states that attempt to practise collective security." 18

Such critical observation helps to typify the lack of reliability on collective security and undermine its strength in the formulation of a viable military strategy despite Henrikson's persuasive recommendations. Arguments by Snider and Grant on the viability of coalitions appear more realistic. Quoting them in this context: "Coalitions, as opposed to collective security measures are for the most part ad-hoc arrangements designed to respond to a rapidly emerging crisis when no formal security arrangement exists. They are characterized by a union of states
that reacts to a short-term threat and disbands soon after the conflict has subsided, often, as in the case of wars in Vietnam and Angola, irrespective of the outcome of the conflict in question. In the Iran-Iraq war, Iraq relied on billions of dollars from the Persian Gulf states for its war effort against Iran while Iran was in turn supported by a loose coalition including Syria — and even Israel. In the recent war in the Gulf which has sometimes been mistakenly referred to as a case of collective security, the United States was dependent on coalition allies for much of the transportation support to move U.S. forces to the theater, and for logistical support once arrived. The diplomatic maneuverings in the months following the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait were a study in accommodating the political demands of coalition participants.” 19 The two authors also note that “the rapidity with which the coalition dissolved at the conclusion of the war also points to the complexity and fluidity of coalition warfare.” 20

With the weakening of collective security interests following the collapse of communism, territorial interests may lead to the coalition of strange bedfellows, even asymmetric and unpredictable in character. Recent Sino-Indian dialogue at the Defense Ministers’ level appears to indicate realisation of vital common interests. A new coalition may be emerging and the U.S. may expect a cooler response to her current plans on Iraq and even on the Burmese democracy-searching process. Ad-hoc coalitions are increasingly capable of responding to mutually-shared interests but may leave little room for weak partners to rise beyond passivity. Future power configuration in our region may greatly reduce chances for gaining China’s security support on issues that affect both India and Burma. Coalition-based alliance may place Sino-Indian relations on a higher plane of sub-systemic amity at the cost of small-state discord with larger India or Burma.

The lesson that seems to emerge regarding the post-Cold War global alliance structure is that it may be suicidal to place all your eggs in one single basket. On the issue of security reliability, it may be futile to formulate any military strategy relying too much on China or even worse, the Islamic group of states. The pathetic attitude of the latter in response to the killings of thousands of Muslims by the Serbs in Bosnia-
Herzegovina is a sober reminder of our important brotherhood. It may, on the contrary, be a more practical effort to work in cooperation with our larger, stronger neighbour and prepare on a long-term basis to respond to any opportune timing that may one day offer the scope for territorial reshuffling or substantive change in the parameters of the currently-structured state system.

The concept of SAARC opens up an entire horizon of unforeseen potentialities including the long-term prospect of demographic intergration of our own racial groups of South Asia. Pakistan’s pretensions of turning to their so-called Mid-East and Central Asian ‘cousins’ and Indian ambitions to educate their north-eastern Mongoloid brothers into Indian nationalists are a mockery of history and anthropology, to say the least. The common history is much too profound to be distorted. In that history, the Brahmin Aryans are as much foreigners as the invading Muslims a thousand years ago—the South Asian ‘melting pot’ has created a common history of long-term integration rather than the endurance of short-term secession. Racial similarities and economic incentives can become a powerful motivating force in any future reordering of the state boundaries. It is only ritualistic that governments and more specifically, the bureaucracies always tend to commit themselves to the status-quo, as if the contemporary times are a permanent fixation for all times to come. Career compulsions and routinized nature of jobs obviously debar the order-minded bureaucracy from widening the mental horizon in the direction of creative break-ups. The state structure guarantees their professional survival as much as it protects the military hierarchy as a security organization of the state.

Having mentioned the above constraints as a typical reality, we need to move beyond the conventional parameters of reckoning the limits in any substantive formulation of military strategy, based so obviously on resource constraints and the potential burden of bearing a large military manpower base. As hinted earlier in this paper, military strategy may also involve looking into the prospect of territorial readjustments. Over the centuries, sub-continental boundaries have often fluctuated with changes in themes of nationalism. Our present boundaries will probably last through the present century unless there is
some surprise in store as in East Europe today. But beyond that period or a decade further, historical factors do indicate possible changes in statehood identity following unbearable population squeeze in this small territory. Modern boundaries are of course far more stable than past systems and they may maintain the continuity where stability and prosperity ensures integration.

This sub-continent, however, has several crisis points and after Punjab and Kashmir, the Indian northeast maintains racial distinctiveness as an enduring incentive for long-term process of conversion into a separate entity. It is in this context that possible future demographic outbursts and forced spillovers from this land may lead to anarchic consequences. That is why, a futuristic military strategy for Bangladesh must require a conscious level of long-term preparation for a thorough grasp of western Burmese and northeastern Indian terrain, nature of warfare, and an approximately thirty-year contingency plan, by which time, many of the present set of realities that debar current offensive strategy may not be so relevant, such as, revised statehood prospects with insurgent ideals revitalized, changes in Indian military psychology, as exemplified by erstwhile Soviet forces and related factors.

Futuristic military strategy construction needs to be vested on those who do not have a vested interest in drawing up reality-scenarios based on career compulsions, so that an academic view may be formed. From an Indian point of view, a renewal of the Indo-Bangladesh Friendship Treaty may continue to be a security imperative in view of her northeast access needs. But then, the prospects for a balanced inter-state demographic reordering and human mobility, like the Indo-Nepalese borders may be envisioned on our eastern frontiers with north-east India. This may be a good starting point for both states to eventually avoid future anarchic prospects, may be around the year 2020 A.D. when a forced spill-over would be catastrophic. Greater migration into the east and towards Arakan are viable prospects on which India and Bangladesh can work together eventually within a shared military strategy.

Strategic imperatives do create strange bed-fellows and offer a great wealth of substance to a future Indo-Bangladesh alliance reliability. Whether it would attain a meaningful turn in the long run is a matter which, perhaps, the old generation of
Pakistan-trained policy planners can never visualize meaningfully. But for the next generation taking over national decision-making issues within the realities of a demographic explosion, there must be some degree of strategic thinking on the question of opening up the eastern frontiers through some form of Indo-Bangladesh military-strategic integration based on historical and racial unity. In the present circumstances of prejudice, religious bigotry and long-held suspicions, the currently-ruling generation on both sides will have nothing creative to offer other than to fall back on the established myths of hatred and stereotyped stalemate. But there shall be a future during the systemic transition when alliance reliability must be built on dialogue, international support and bridge-building efforts with current adversaries.
Notes and References

2. Ibid.
15. Alan Henrikson, op.cit.
16. Ibid.
18. Robert Art, op.cit.
19. Snider and Grant, op.cit., 221-223.
20. Ibid.