FOREIGN POLICY AND NATION BUILDING IN BANGLADESH

Mizanur Rahman Khan
Golam Mostafa
Rezaul Haque

Introduction

Nation building is generally referred to as a process that reflects people’s inner-self through their adherence to race, religion, language and culture. Nation building is an endless and multi-dimensional process which involves continuous search for consolidation of national identity, socio-cultural integration and healthy growth of socio-politico-economic institutions for development.

The task of nation building of the developing countries like Bangladesh is crucial and at the same time complicated by a lack of mutual feed-back between the policy-making and the opinion-building segments of the nation and also by an endemic crisis in national consensus on vital issues. In today’s Bangladesh the task of nation building involves:

(a) establishment of a modern state structure;
(b) securing political stability which can arise from national solidarity and reconciliation;
(c) liquidation of all forms of external domination and assertion of national sovereignty and
(d) rapid promotion of economic development and social equality.
For the achievement of the above mentioned goals there should be a defined national ‘policy’ which, as Padelford, Lincoln and Olvey hold, “is the overall result of the processes by which a state translates it’s broadly conceived goals and interests into specific courses of action in order to achieve it’s objectives and preserve it’s interests”.¹ And foreign policy is an integral part of this national policy which relates to external environment and at the same time has important bearing on the domestic issues and forces. Foreign policy may reflect political ideologies as well as historical interests, leadership style and social forces. So, before analysing the role of foreign policy in nation building, it is necessary to have a brief understanding of what foreign policy is.

Foreign policy can be defined as a strategy or planned course of action developed by the decision-makers of a state vis-a-vis other states or international entities aimed at achieving specific goals defined in terms of national interests.² National interest is the fundamental objective and simultaneously the ultimate determinant that guides the decision-makers in making foreign policy. National interest serves as a means of justifying, denouncing or proposing policies, including the foreign policy. In fact foreign policy of a country is a projection in the international milieu of the domestic objectives and policies of that state.

Thus, foreign policy of any country—both developed and developing—has to act as a contributing force of nation building where relatively fixed interpretations of national interest are to be applied to the highly fluctuating international environment. This seems to be more so for the newly-emergent countries in the post-colonial era when they started playing an independent role in world politics, formerly a preserve of the colonial powers.

This new role-playing by the smaller and weaker countries, as independent units vis-a-vis the rest of the world for their due and honourable place in global system, has committed them to greater involvement in the international scene. Together, global communication revolution greatly helped to foster the growing interdependence among nation-states, big and small. Therefore, domestic politics of a country cannot be insulated from the trends and developments in the global arena. Each major act wherever perpetrated affects the nation-state system in ways not experienced before and the small states must scurry to shield themselves from consequences.

Therefore, foreign policy is an effective tool in ensuring national security which for a developing country like Bangladesh is preservation of political independence, territorial integrity and attainment of the objectives of national development, peace and progress at the same time. The relevance of foreign policy in promoting these primary national goals becomes all the more important when the acute resource constraints and technological backwardness of the developing countries are taken into consideration. One recent study on the issue concludes that from the criterion of war capability, the prospect of political survival of a nation in the Third World is really dim and it could be much improved by better diplomacy and other political strategies falling within the general purview of foreign policy. Thus, much of the answer to the question as to how a developing nation like Bangladesh survives and builds up herself could be traced in how it manoeuvres in the complex international system of the present day world.

3. For illustration of the role of foreign policy or more precisely, diplomacy, see Prof. Talukder Maniruzzaman, *Security of Small States in the Third World* (Canberra Papers, No. 25, the Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, Canberra, 1982).

4. Ibid.
Since its inception in 1971, Bangladesh as a poor, small in size, overwhelmingly aid-dependent and militarily weak nation witnessed both continuity and change in her foreign policy postures. This was in fact the result of a dialectical interaction between objective necessities of a war-ravaged newly-independent nation and the changing international environment. Since Bangladesh lacks resources to attain the military deterrent capability to face external aggression, that gap has to be compensated by her well-thought-out foreign policy postures. Keeping in view of the realities of Bangladesh, over the years the following core objectives of Bangladesh foreign policy were articulated:

a. to consolidate and safeguard independence and sovereignty;

b. to develop bilateral, regional and international cooperation with a view to accelerating the process of economic and social development of the country; and

c. to cooperate with the international community in promoting the cause of peace, freedom and progress.

From a reading of the above objectives, it is evident that the first one relates to maintenance of our security, both from external and internal threats and the second one mainly, but implicitly, denotes seeking of external assistance for our socio-economic development. The third objective can be said to be complementary to realizing the first two goals. The present paper is an attempt to understand how far Bangladesh foreign policy could go in materializing the two vital goals of our nation: maintenance of security and ensuring adequate flow of external resources for development, and thereby contributing to the cause of nation building process.

Before going into details of the sources of threats to our security, it is pertinent first to have a look at our objective realities. With an area of 55,598 sq. miles, Bangladesh is located in the Gangetic delta of the Sub-continent. Looking at our geographical location, Bangladesh can’t be said to have geopolitically an advantageous position. This country is bounded by many-times bigger India on three sides: West, North and partly East with a common border of 2566 miles, by Burma on the East with a border of 123 miles and by the Bay in Bengal of the South for 257 miles. Further, the coastline of Bangladesh is concave and not convex as is India’s. This is also a point of weakness in terms of the potential resources Bangladesh could have gained through the Exclusive Economic Zone under Law of the Sea Treaty.

Politically, even after 14 years of independence Bangladesh is yet to introduce a stable system of government. Economically, Bangladesh is almost the poorest country in the world, given the extreme paucity of resources on the one hand and enormous population problems on the other. Bangladesh export can finance only one-third of her import needs. Naturally aid-dependence has been overwhelming since independence. On an average 76-80 percent of the Annual Development Programme has been financed by foreign aid. Chronic food deficits, technological backwardness and lack of sufficient domestic resources account for this alarmingly high aid-dependence.

As to socio-cultural and religious values, Bangladesh can be said to have a point of strength. Historically, the people of Bangladesh represent a mixture of many ethnic and cultural strains over time happily blended into a distinct national entity. It should be noted that the ethno-religious homogeneity in Bangladesh is highest in South Asia, the figure being 98 percent as compared
to 72 percent in Maldives, 53 percent in Sri Lanka, 36 percent in Pakistan and 11 percent in India.\(^6\)

Under the above conditions—what might be the possible sources of external threats to our security? Today in an increasingly interdependent world, security of the developing nations like Bangladesh pertains to both regional and extra-regional forms. The militarily weak and poor nations like ours suffer from a sense of constant insecurity arising out of the current international politico-strategic and economic environment.

Although the earlier rigid bipolar power configuration has become loose, giving way to a gradually evolving polycentric world with multiple power centres, the current international politico-strategic environment is still characterised by the Superpower rivalry, and their struggle for political, economic and ideological influence in the Third World is adversely affecting the nation building process. The strategic location of some of the developing countries, possession of raw materials vitally needed by the industrialised world, their power to exercise votes in the international forums and also the internal politico-economic instabilities in these countries have tempted the great powers to adopt overt or covert interventionist policy towards the domestic and foreign policy concerns of the Third World countries. Since the WW II, out of around 150 instances of major inter and intra-state violence that have taken place in the World, all but 8 or 10 took place in the Third World and in nearly two-thirds of such instances, there were interventions by the major powers.\(^7\)

The independence movement of Bangladesh is very much a case in point showing how economic and political conflicts within a

---

developing country threaten to draw the major powers on the verge of direct confrontation. The involvement of great powers is dependent on the domestic political situation of individual countries and the pattern of their regional and extra-regional alignments. Experiences show that democratic system of governments with broad based participation in foreign and security policies are less likely to fall prey to intervention.

The present inequitable international economic order also poses both direct and indirect threats to the security and survival of the developing nations like Bangladesh. The emergence of a great number of independent nations on the political map of the world was not accompanied by desired changes in the world economic system. The developed countries enjoyed the fastest growth rate during the 1950s and 1960s when the price of energy and raw materials was many-times cheaper. Now, especially the oil-importing developing countries including Bangladesh are hard hit on the one hand by the rising prices of oil and manufactured items from the West and on the other, by the diminishing prices of their own exports which mostly consist of primary products. As a result, the terms of trade for the developing countries have sharply deteriorated giving rise to colossal balance of payment deficits.

The result of these unwelcome experiences is the launching of the struggle by the Third World (South) to establish a New international Economic Order (NIEO) which subsequently ensued the North-South dialogue. The demand for a NIEO, among others, included transfer of resources, trade reforms and restructuring of the international monetary order. But no significant progress was achieved so far due to unwillingness of the developed North to part away with their well-entrenched dominance over the present system. What is most disquieting is the shrinking trend of multilateral development assistance to the poor countries. Instead, both the Superpowers are overtly tending to use their bilateral aid to
needy countries as an instrument of their foreign policy. Countries like Bangladesh where foreign aid constitutes the major portion of development budget are bound to be influenced by the big power aid politics. This influence goes down to our foreign policy directions, our security perceptions and alignment pattern and very much to our domestic orientation as well. This naturally impinges on our manoeuvrability. Besides, for a country like Bangladesh, any abrupt shrinkage of aid-flows entails great social and economic hazards.

While analysing the security threats emanating from the regional sources, it should be underlined that Bangladesh has cordial relations with all the countries of South Asia except some lingering strains with India, the biggest and powerful immediate neighbour. Of course Bangladesh has two outstanding issues—division of assets and repatriation of expatriates—with Pakistan. But these issues cannot be related to our security threats.

Looking at the pattern of Indo-Bangladesh relations over the years, it can be deduced that India poses not directly a military threat, rather it is of political and economic in nature. The Clausewitzian dictum of 'war is a continuation of politics by other means' does not hold great stake for India in relation to Bangladesh, for physical occupation entails great material and moral costs now-a-days. Politically what India wants from Bangladesh is a Government subservient to her interests—both politico-military and economic. India is out to exert herself as the regional power making other smaller neighbours including Bangladesh follow the prescribed line of her security ordit. This was blatantly evident after the 1975 change of Government in Bangladesh when India provided material help to the Bangladeshi dissidents making armed incursions from Indian territory. Also then India unilaterally withdrew the flow of Ganges water to 'punish' the new Government. The nature of stalemate in resolution of issues such as sharing of river waters, South Talpatty, demarcation of maritime boundary
and barbed-wire fencing, shows Indian intention to politically intimi­date Bangladesh. Besides, reports suggested that the so-called ‘Shanti Bahihi’ in Chittagong Hill Tracts were given training and arms by India. Of course that problem now has subsided to a great extent with our Government’s liberal policy of involving the tribal people into the national life.

India for her expanding industrial and technological base needs neighbouring markets for further development. This was evident immediately after the independence of Bangladesh. Besides, Farakka problem poses a grave threat to the economic security of Bangladesh, for it adversely affects the entire southwestern region, covering 33 percent of our population and 37 percent of the total land area which is dependent on the Ganges water.

Having outlined the externally-originated threats to the indepen­dence and sovereignty of Bangladesh, it is necessary to analyse how Bangladesh through her foreign policy postures so far tried to neutralise those threats—real and perceived.

The independence of Bangladesh was the unique case since WW II which achieved success through an armed secessionist movement in 1971. In real sense, the movement for an independent Bangladesh cannot be dubbed as secessionist, for the majority of a nation wanted to establish an independent entity of their own to get rid of the internal colonialism of the minority. Nevertheless, as the interna­tional community is less prone to see any change of the state-system already established, there were some initial misgivings in some quar­ters about the way Bangladesh gained independence. Therefore, right from the beginning Bangladesh set to the task of convincing the comity of nations that although born through an armed struggle, the people of Bangladesh are a peace-loving nation keenly seeking to maintain regional and international peace and stability so that she can embark on rebuilding her war-shattered economy and polity.

Within one year of independence, by the end of 1972, Bangladesh was recognised by more than 90 countries including the two Super­powers. However, Bangladesh had to wait to get recognition from
two major countries—Saudi Arabia and China till the violent change of leadership in August 1975.

Initially Bangladesh was said to have had an Indo-Soviet tilt in her foreign policy directions, for these two countries provided most of the moral and material support to the independence movement. Then initiatives were taken by the Mujib Government to gradually redress this tilt, as the objective realities of the country then dictated. After the change of Government in 1975 this process was vigorously pursued and within a short time the foreign policy was put on a more even keel keeping in full view the national concerns. Close and cordial relations were cultivated with the countries of the Middle East and China, for both political and economic reasons.

Within the country, a convergence was observed in the thinking of the leaders ever since independence on some of the basic principles in structuring the foreign policy of Bangladesh. For example, (i) in safeguarding her independence and territorial integrity Bangladesh should follow the path of peace and friendship and abjure the use of force in the settlement of disputes; (ii) in steering clear of power blocs Bangladesh should follow the path of nonalignment; (iii) maintain and promote fraternal relations with the Islamic countries; (iv) promote international cooperation with countries of both blocs to ensure flow of external resources for socio-economic development; and (v) commitment to uphold the interests of the Third World and combat racism and colonialism in all forms.8

In order to uphold and advocate the above principles in relations among nation-states, Bangladesh from the initial years sought and gained membership of the international organizations, such as the Non-aligned Movement in September 1973, Commonwealth in 1972, Organization of Islamic Conference in February 1974 and the United Nations in September 1974.


239
Bangladesh took an active policy of cultivating close working relations with these widely-represented organisations for reasons, among others, to enhance her sense of security and to use these as forums for stance on issues—both regional and global which are likely to serve her interests and the cause of international peace. For example, Bangladesh made use of the UN in 1976 by raising the Ganges water dispute when a Resolution was adopted whereby both India and Bangladesh were urged to peacefully resolve the dispute through negotiations.

Besides, these world forums enable Bangladesh to publicly identify herself with the weaker LDCs who are out to continue the struggle for the NIEO and global disarmament. The latter, gradually achieved, could release sufficient funds for development of the poorest countries like Bangladesh. Also the international bodies provide Bangladesh along with many others the opportunity to avoid causing direct annoyance to big powers which could have occurred if she were to present her views on those issues bilaterally. It may be mentioned here that although the USSR helped our independence movement and initially Bangladesh was very close to the former, she gradually cultivated cordial relations with USA also. At present USA is the largest aid donor to Bangladesh. But even then, Bangladesh did not want to be locked into a situation where alliance is to be sought with either of the Superpowers. To quote a Bangladeshi leader:

Since Bangladesh cannot afford to offend any big power it is necessary to maintain reasonable relations with each. Relation with one may be emphasised than relation with the other at any point of time but we cannot afford to sustain such emphasis at the expense of our links with the other.9

Another important aspect of Bangladesh foreign policy is her active pursuance of good neighbourly relations. This emanates

from her constitutional principle of peaceful co-existence and sovereign equality. Dictated by the nation building goals for which resources at her disposal are very limited, Bangladesh firmly believes that only in an atmosphere of peace and goodwill in the immediate neighbourhood, the task can be accomplished in the shortest possible time. With this end in view, the idea of Regional Cooperation was mooted by Bangladesh in 1980. Initially this cooperation was envisaged to cover economic and cultural fields. Bangladesh believed that in an atmosphere of historical mistrust and suspicion in South Asia, good dividends to individual countries accruing through cooperation in non-political fields are likely to gradually foster political understanding and amity among the countries of the region. Already the idea got well off the ground and in August 1983 the South Asian Regional Cooperation (SARC) was formally launched at the Foreign Ministers’ Conference in Delhi. The first summit of SARC countries is going to be hosted in Dhaka in the first week of December 1985. This first ever summit of regional leaders is expected to add momentum to the growing cooperation at multilateral level in our part of the world.

In view of Bangladesh’s active and positive contribution to seeking peace and stability in regional as well as global levels, she got good dividends in terms of creating a good image of Bangladesh as a nation-state. This is clearly manifest in her election as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council for a period of two years (1979-81). Also Bangladesh was reposed with positions of honour in the NAM, OIC and G77 and many other international bodies.

Now, turning to internal security, it should be pointed out that the main threat comes from internal political instability which arises from lack of consensus among different segments of the society on vital national issues including the foreign policy directions. Although it has been mentioned earlier that a convergence could be observed among different regimes in Bangladesh in relation to
some basic principles of foreign policy formulation, it is felt that still there is a lack of consensus about the sources of security threats and the ways to neutralise those. This is evident from the fact that different political groups and forces are believed to hold divergent views over various regional and international issues and Bangladesh’s stand on these. This certainly stands in the way of evolving a long-term and consistent direction in our foreign policy. Apart from this, instability within the country may arise from ethnic and refugee problems and also from insurgency. If the forces behind those problems receive input from external powers, they pose a threat to national security. In such cases, the country concerned needs to pursue a prudent and pragmatic policy in relation to both internal and external forces. And Bangladesh did quite well in this regard.

As it has been mentioned earlier, one of the major tasks of foreign policy, given the sheer resource scarcity vis-a-vis vast magnitude of poverty is to seek external assistance for accelerating the pace of economic and social development of the country. The underdeveloped countries need external aid mainly because these countries have narrow scope of mobilizing enough domestic savings and suffer from continuous unfavourable balance of payments. And for a country like Bangladesh, where more than 80 percent of population live in below poverty line with one of the lowest average per capita income, serious unemployment, under-nourishment, low productivity and investment, the need for external aid can not be overemphasised. Moreover, the natural calamities like cyclone, flood, drought etc. have made the condition more critical. In his first press conference as Prime Minister, Sheikh Mujib appealed to all countries and international humanitarian organizations for assistance.10 It was also emphasized, however, that Bangladesh would accept aid from any

source but without any political tag. As the leadership was strongly committed to non-aligned foreign policy and wanted to build up a "socialist society" free from external influence, the government tried to diversify the sources of aid with a view to ensuring that no individual country or group of countries would become so dominant that could constrain domestic policy options and external relations. However, it was not an easy task. The worldwide economic crisis in early 1970s had made the situation more complex and the government of the new state had very limited options. The OPEC countries had not yet emerged as donors and the Western industrialised countries and international monetary agencies dominated by the West controlled the lion's share of international aid. Although Bangladesh developed close friendly relations with the socialist countries and India at the initial stage of her independence, the aid received from these sources was insufficient to meet the growing need of the new nation. As Table-I shows, upto June 1975 Bangladesh received a total of US $ 3321.5 million aid from different sources and the share of the socialist countries and India was $ 689.4 million i.e. about 21 percent of the total. Moreover, for rehabilitation and to meet the crisis situation Bangladesh urgently needed food and commodity aid which the socialist countries and India could not provide. Rather they preferred to increase the project aid. There were also other difficulties in implementing the projects aided by the socialist countries. The equipments supplied by them were not familiar to the Bangladeshi experts and technicians and the projects were delayed indefinitely while the projects funded by other sources were implemented much earlier. Many experts including government officials were reluctant to accept project aid from socialist countries because of a fear that such links would be perpetuated through the need for spare parts and technical service.

As a result, inspite of close political relations with the socialist countries, Bangladesh's aid relations with them suffered a set-back and bred considerable frustration from both sides. Professor Rehman
Sobhan held, "Notwithstanding the prevailing cordiality in external relations, the task of re-directing economic ties toward the socialist bloc was in practice much more difficult".11

### Table - I

**Flow of External Resources to Bangladesh (in million US $)**  
(16 December 1971 - 30 June 1975)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Food</th>
<th>Commodity</th>
<th>Project</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DAC Countries</td>
<td>601.6</td>
<td>530.1</td>
<td>310.8</td>
<td>1442.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>57.5</td>
<td>44.7</td>
<td>28.5</td>
<td>43.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International</td>
<td>258.9</td>
<td>387.8</td>
<td>369.0</td>
<td>1015.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>24.7</td>
<td>23.7</td>
<td>33.9</td>
<td>30.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socialist</td>
<td>165.1</td>
<td>176.4</td>
<td>347.9</td>
<td>689.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Countries and</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>31.9</td>
<td>20.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OPEC Countries</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>89.0</td>
<td>62.2</td>
<td>166.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>1046.4</td>
<td>1185.2</td>
<td>1089.9</td>
<td>3321.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>%</strong></td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. excludes IDB and OPEC Fund  
b. includes IDB and OPEC Fund

Source: The table is prepared from data presented in Tables 4, 5 and 6 in *Flow of External Resources into Bangladesh (As of June 30, 1983)*, External Resources Division, Ministry of Finance, Government of Bangladesh, Dhaka.

Although the government of Sheikh Mujib with all rhetorics announced to build up a "socialist society" and formulated the external policy accordingly, ultimately it failed to bring the desired goals. As is seen in Table-I, upto 1975 the DAC countries and the International Agencies contributed 74 percent of the total aid received by Bangladesh from different sources. So it was rather a dilemma and an "obvious contradiction in building a socialist system with non-socialist assistance." The Government had no options but to seek help from other sources. And although the government from the very beginning refused to accept any pre-independence debt liability, under the pressure of the donors in 1974 it had to accept such liability of $ 636 million.

After the political change in 1975 the aid direction also changed. The share of India and the socialist countries abruptly declined and in June 1978 their share reduced to only 3.6 percent as compared to about 21 percent in 1975. Although in late 1970s and early 1980s the aid from socialist countries and India somewhat increased, upto June 1983 their share was only about 4 percent of the total aid. On the other hand, President Ziaur Rahman tried to institutionalise relations with the oil-rich Arab countries and with the Western countries and necessary steps, including some amendments and addition in the constitution and readjustment of foreign policy were undertaken. As a result, the volume of aid from the DAC countries, International Agencies and OPEC countries increased dramatically since 1976. As Table - II shows the aid from DAC countries in mid 1983 totalled $ 4754.2 million compared to only $ 1442.5 million in 1975. In like manner, the aid from International Agencies and OPEC countries also increased greatly. In June 1983 the share of the OPEC countries in total aid increased upto 9 percent compared to only 5 percent upto 1975. The total volume of aid for the period 1975-76 to June 1983 was $ 8151.6 million compared to only $ 3321 million for the period 1971 to 1974-75.

12. Iftekhar A. Choudhury, op. cit. p. 290
Now, about 80 percent of Bangladesh's annual development expenditure comes from external aid and the DAC countries provide the lion's share. In the Revised Annual Development Programme for 1984-85 the foreign aid contributed about 75 percent and in
the original ADP the share of external aid was more than 80 percent.\textsuperscript{13}

With this absolute dependency on external aid, it is very difficult for a country to design her own development strategy and to pursue policies—both in domestic and international arena—free from external influence. The external resources available cannot be separated from the motives that make them available. The aid diplomacy of the developed countries may be apparently meant for sharing their resources, expertise and experience, but in the case of less developed countries it can invariably be used by the donors for putting pressure on the recipients and to use them in their global politico-strategic pursuit. These pressures may take different forms. Sometimes it is directed to influence the decision-making process of the government to serve various interests. Very often the donors “attempted to influence policies” on state ownership, the role of the private sector, the monetary and fiscal policies of the regime, pricing policy, distribution policy, the use of administrative controls, the structure of development expenditure, the external value of the currency, the pattern of development administration and a variety of other operational, policy oriented and ideological issues.”\textsuperscript{14} Dr. Fasihuddin Mabtab, a former Planning Minister of Bangladesh admitted: “We have to frame 90 percent of our development plans in ways that please the aid-givers”.\textsuperscript{15}

In external arena the donor countries often try to use the recipients in their own interests particularly to vote in their favour or to support their cause. Thus aid diplomacy has emerged as an important phenomenon and became an effective mechanism to

\textsuperscript{14} Rehman Sobhan, \textit{op. cit.} p. 146
influence the domestic and foreign policies of the recipient countries. As David Jordon in his book "World Politics in Our Time" observed, "To gain the objectives of the state, diplomatists have at their disposal instruments which are more coercive than propaganda and psychological warfare; the more useful and the widely employed ones to attain the aims of foreign policy are the economic ones which have traditionally been used by donor or creditor countries." Economic aid, in fact, always serves as a powerful tool in achieving foreign policy goals. Aid, whether bilateral or multilateral, is a vehicle for the donors who gear their aid programmes to pursue the objectives of their foreign policies.

So the question arises whether Bangladesh should go for external assistance which seriously constrains her options and choices, particularly in the field of development activities. There are differing opinions. Some vehemently oppose accepting any foreign aid and argue that with external assistance Bangladesh can never build up a self-sustaining economy. But foreign aid has not always negative effects and there are countries who have become models of development for the Third World by using massive external assistance. Even in the development of North America and many of the industrialised countries in Europe between 1884-1914 over 50 percent of the capital investment came from external sources.

The objective conditions in Bangladesh suggest that she has no alternative, at least at present, than to seek external aid essential for her economic and political security. Since foreign aid is integrally related to external relations, one of the major foreign policy strategy of Bangladesh should be to ensure adequate inflow of resources from abroad. At the same time the government will have to ensure maximum foreign aid with minimum political commitment so that it does not constrain the foreign policy options and manoeuvrability. But as the sources of aid are not many, the


248
choices are very limited and the task is extremely difficult. However, by pursuing an active, non-aligned, balanced, peaceful foreign policy Bangladesh can ensure the maximum possible external aid that can serve her interest best in building a self-reliant viable nation.

Conclusion

It is evident from the foregoing discussion that foreign policy of a developing country like Bangladesh, as a contributing force in the nation building process, has to perform primarily two functions. First of all, it has to ensure national security and secondly, it should mobilize external resources for national economic and social development.

The objective realities of Bangladesh dictate that threat to our security and sovereignty arising from external sources has to be neutralised by pursuing a prudent and pragmatic foreign policy rather than by military deterrence. Since national security is a prerequisite for building the nation and Bangladesh is militarily weak to deter the security threats, the role of foreign policy in ensuring security and thus in nation building becomes more prominent. It is through foreign policy manoeuvring and wider interaction, both at bilateral and multilateral levels, a positive national image can be established. This would not only neutralise the threats to security, but also help to develop friendly relations with other nations.

For achieving these goals, there should be a long-term strategy in nation building by which the course of foreign policy will be guided. But unfortunately, even after 14 years of independence, Bangladesh could not evolve a long-term strategy for her nation building. Naturally, our foreign policy reflects this unstable pattern, sometime through short-term reactive responses, rather than having a long-term perspective regarding the goals and directions of foreign policy.
Given our massive dependence on foreign sources for economic development and considering the present pattern of political and economic alignment, there arises justified doubts whether our nation has real independence in interactions with the external world. It is, therefore, of utmost importance that our foreign policy has to be formulated and executed in such a way that would ensure maximum flow of external resources for economic development and at the same time increase our options and manoeuvrability in our foreign policy behaviour. What is necessary for this purpose is to maintain a balanced foreign policy based on genuine non-alignment and friendly relations with all nations. A very important prerequisite for achieving this goal is an efficient core of diplomats who would be active and articulate enough to always project our national concerns in the international arena.
VI CONCLUDING STATEMENT*

The two-day Seminar on “Nation Building in Bangladesh: Retrospect and Prospect” held under the auspices of the Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies during 13-14 October, 1985 concludes with the present session.

The Seminar, the first of its kind in Bangladesh, was attended by about 200 distinguished participants representing academic institutions, research organisations and governmental and non-governmental bodies from all over the country.

The Seminar was organised in four working sessions, and twelve learned papers dwelling on different aspects of the theme were presented during these sessions. I would like to express our gratitude to all distinguished participants, in particular the authors of the papers, the designated discussants and chairmen of the working sessions.

The Seminar provided an open forum for an objective, academic, in-depth and free interaction among scholars on the concept of nation building in Bangladesh and its underlying problems—political, economic and social including their external dimensions through the learned papers and discussion by designated discussants and participants in the Seminar.

The idea of holding the Seminar on an issue of paramount national importance like nation building was warmly welcomed by the participants. It was also expected that the deliberations would contribute significantly in carrying forward the nation building efforts in Bangladesh. Needless to stress that organisation of such seminars

*Address by Prof. M. Shamsul Huq, Chairman, Board of Governors, BIISS, at the concluding session of the Seminar under reference—Eds.
in future can be of immense value in sustaining the momentum generated by the present Seminar to furnish valuable inputs to policy and decision making in the country on this central problem.

The distinguished participants brought out different theoretical and operational perspectives on nation building focussing on the specific conditions obtained in Bangladesh from a historical and comparative perspective. It was strongly felt that at the scholarly and academic level further in-depth studies should be undertaken to sharpen the perception of the multi-dimensional issues related to national identity and national value consensus including such factors as language, religion, culture, territory and above all, history as a guide for the present and future.

The learned deliberations brought into sharp focus the following basic problems which continue to bedevil the nation building process in Bangladesh:

(i) inadequate, weak and unstable state of socio-politico-economic institutions;

(ii) widening elite-mass gap in perception and expectation as well as in social, economic and political status and strength;

(iii) distorted pattern of whatever development takes place and absence of participatory democracy involving the masses;

(iv) prevailing divergence amounting almost to polarization among the various interest groups in perspective and perception over the pattern of group role and continued confusion over the structure and composition of power;

(v) compartmentalised and fragmented approach to different problems of nation building, for example, economic development and growth treated in isolation from political and social development, distributive aspect overlooked in growth considerations, and the like;
(vi) the inherited structure of the civil and military bureaucracy characterized by their dominant role in a power structure alienated from the people;

(vii) dichotomy in national identity resulting from the shifts in emphasis on language and religion;

(viii) under-emphasis of the role of judiciary in settlement of conflicts and disputes on national issues not only during the military regime but also under civilian administration;

(ix) lack of perception of the primacy of political factors in social and economic change;

(x) over-dependence on external aid with its deleterious effect on a self-reliant economy through optimum mobilization and utilisation of domestic resources, indigenous technology and local values and institutions;

(xi) non-recognition of the importance of self-scrutiny at individual, group and societal levels and failure to generate and uphold the sense of pride and self-respect despite the existence of poverty and underdevelopment;

(xii) politics of value expediency placing the party above the programme and ideology;

(xiii) patron-client pervasiveness in both urban and the rural society;

(xiv) foreign-policy weakness stemming from lack of adequate domestic inputs because of political instability and external aid dependence;

Despite the scope for divergent views on the issues discussed, there was a striking agreement on the imperative of a national consensus on the following:

(i) The concept of nationalism viewed in its dynamic perspective;

(ii) Core values including national ideology;
(iii) Types of political, economic and social institutions directly oriented to people's participation;
(iv) Power structure and the group roles.

Once the consensus on the major issues is reached, building stable social, political and economic institutions was considered to be the most important catalytic agent in accelerating the nation building process in Bangladesh. Such institutions must not only cater to the needs and aspirations of the masses but also must create the basis for their effective participation in the nation building process.

In building and developing participatory institutions care should be taken to strengthen and re-orient the existing institutions in such a way that structurally and functionally these institutions and not any individuals or groups, however public-minded he or they may be, can serve as the allocator of values, norms and roles.

The nation as a whole can make significant advances only when the common man has an equal access to opportunities of education, productive efforts and participation in the political process. This assumes that efforts should be made to transform the present status of the masses as subjects to that of active and valued participants.

The participants in the Seminar strongly felt that concrete measures should be taken to make the economy self-reliant geared to ensuring comprehensive upliftment of socio-politico-economic status of the disadvantaged masses.

While recognizing the need for external resource flow for development, there was also a general agreement that strict measures should be taken to be selective in accepting external assistance. The objective would be to make foreign aid complementary to domestic resources and not a substitute for them. Implicit in such a strategy is the urge to make the country's external posture more responsive to domestic compulsions.

Last but not the least, there was a general consensus that as distinct from the existing pattern of self-seeking behaviour of the
power-elite, democratic norms and values should be viewed in the ultimate analysis as the real catalyst for nation building. The Seminar felt that the sooner democratic order is established, the less will be the cost and faster will be the pace of progress in nation building in Bangladesh.

The Seminar noted that Bangladesh foreign policy despite the geo-political constraints and her economic and military weaknesses showed a remarkable degree of stability and resilience in serving the twin objectives of national security and securing international cooperation in her nation building effort.

While recognizing that turbulence and violence were inherent in the process of development, the Seminar felt that the traumatic experiences of Bangladesh since independence underlined the urgency of paying greater attention to the internal threats to her security posed by political polarization and instability and the explosive problems of increasing poverty, widening disparity and sharpening of mass-elite alienation.

The distinguished participants ended their deliberations on a note of optimism because they agreed that the problems were essentially of human action and behaviour which were always subject to modifications.
NOTE ON CONTRIBUTORS AND OTHER RESOURCE PERSONS

The Contributors

Dr. Iftekharuzzaman, Deputy Director, Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies, Dhaka

Mr. Mahbubur Rahman, Research Officer, Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies, Dhaka

Dr. M. G. Kabir, Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, University of Rajshahi, Rajshahi

Mr. Abdur Rob Khan, Deputy Director, Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies, Dhaka

Miss Khaleda Nazneen, former Research Officer, Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies, Dhaka

Dr. Atiur Rahman, Research Fellow, Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies, Dhaka

Dr. Qazi Kohliuzzaman Ahmad, Research Director, Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies, and President, Bangladesh Unnayan Parishad, Dhaka

Dr. A. N. Shamsul Hoque, Professor of Political Science, University of Rajshahi, Rajshahi

Dr. Mizanur Rahman Shelley, Chairman, Centre for Development Research, Bangladesh, Dhaka

Dr. Emaajuddin Ahamed, Professor of Political Science, University of Dhaka, Dhaka
Mr. Tabarak Husain, former Foreign Secretary of Bangladesh
Dr. Ataur Rahman, Professor of Political Science and Dean, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Dhaka, Dhaka

Mr. Mizanur Rahman Khan, Assistant Director, Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies, Dhaka

Mr. Golam Mostafa, Assistant Director, Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies, Dhaka

Dr. Rezaul Haque, former Assistant Director, Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies, Dhaka

The Editors

Brig M Abdul Hafiz
Director General
Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies, Dhaka

Mr. Abdur Rob Khan
Deputy Director
Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies, Dhaka

Session Chairmen

Prof. M. Shamsul Huq
Chairman, Board of Governors
Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies, Dhaka

Mr. A. K. M. Ahsan
Chairman, Bangladesh Krishi Bank, Dhaka.

Prof. Salahuddin Ahmed
Department of History
University of Dhaka

Ambassador A.K.H. Morshed
Additional Foreign Secretary
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Govt. of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
Designated Discussants

Prof. Ataur Rahman
Dept. Political Science
University of Dhaka.

Prof. Mohammad Mohabbat Khan
Dept. of Public Administration
University of Dhaka.

Prof. Talukdar Maniruzzaman
Dept. of Political Science
University of Dhaka

Prof. Taherul Islam
Dept. of Economics
University of Dhaka

Dr. Tawfiq-e Elahi Chowdhury
Ministry of Finance
Govt. of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

Prof. Abdullah Farouk
Department of Marketing
University of Dhaka

Dr. Akbar Ali Khan
Public Administration Training Centre
Savar, Dhaka

Dr. Shaikh Maqsood Ali
Establishment Division
Govt. of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

Prof. B.K. Jahangir
Dept. of Political Science
University of Dhaka

Dr. Mizanur Rahman Shelley
Centre for Development Research, Bangladesh
Mr. Shahiduzzaman
Department of International Relations
University of Dhaka

Ambassador Humayun Kabir
Foreign Affairs Training Institute
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Dhaka.

Rapporteurs
Mrs. Nilufar Chowdhury
Miss. Rezina Ahmed
Dr. Abhijit Karmaker
Mr. A.K.M. Abdus Sabur
Mr. Mahbubur Rahman
Miss Khaleda Nazneen