

M. Aynul Islam

MAPPING TERRORISM THREATS IN BANGLADESH

Abstract

Terrorism has in recent times emerged as a major challenge to Bangladesh. The discourse on terrorism has changed; it is marked by new trends and the terrorist threats are now more diverse in terms of motivation, financing, and security implications. The government response to terrorism in Bangladesh demonstrates the use of 'hard power' without addressing the root causes and new trends. The government has been strategically, operationally and tactically challenged by the new techniques and technology of terrorism. In such a context, the paper aims to map out terrorism threat in Bangladesh, considering threat indicators and levels, so that a viable anti-terrorism strategy can be developed. Analysing the available threat indicators and applying SWOT tools, the paper argues that the threat of domestic terrorism has been significantly reduced since the dismantling of the leadership pattern of the extremist groups. However, given Bangladesh's limited counter terrorism strengths and the increasing access of the threat groups to many opportunities, the potential threat indicators are still visible on the country's horizon. The paper emphasises on long-term measures such as modernization of religious education system, eradication of social disparities, strengthening of community response, utilization of local knowledge and capacity, and identification of 'strategic communication' tools to interact with extremist individuals and groups in order to develop a

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comprehensive strategy to face the menace of terrorism in Bangladesh.

1. INTRODUCTION

Global anti-terrorist security spending has since 2001 been rising by between US\$65 billion and US\$200 billion a year. Today, seven years after the 9/11 incidents, analysing the costs and benefits, it has been claimed that the benefits are still lower than the costs.¹ The recent literature demonstrates new trends and techniques of terrorism world-wide. If someone dismantles operational tactics in one part of the world, the other part moves with even deadlier tactics - the ideological networking. Thus, the new counter terrorism discourse looks for new techniques and understanding in order to reduce the impact of terrorism on society. Moreover, over time, the type, number and lethality of terrorist attacks, the attitudes of terrorist groups, and other factors have changed. A report on *Trends in Terrorism: 2006* by the U.S. Congressional Research Service (CRS) identifies three new trends of global terrorism. First, the emergence of micro-actors with capability of terrorist groups, i.e. reduction in the operational capability of the terrorist groups, but increase in their ideological, motivational, and propaganda ability. The second is the promotion of operational sophistication of terrorist activities, using modern technology and global information flow, finance and ideas in planning, communications, and targeting. As a matter of fact, many analysts consider terrorism a web-directed phenomenon.² And the last is the increasing trend of overlapping terrorist activities with transnational crime, using the same supply, transport, and money-moving networks.³ The world-wide terrorist activities, successive attacks, and propaganda demonstrate new intentions, capabilities, and opportunities for further attacks.

¹ Todd Sandler, Daniet Arce and Walter Enders, "Transnational Terrorism", Quoted in *the Economist*, 8 March 2008, p.69.

² Steve Coll and Susan B.Glasser, "Terrorists Turn to the Web as Base of Operations", *The Washington Post*, 7 August 2005, p.1; Gabriel Weimann, "Terror on the Internet: The New Arena, the New Challenges", The United States Institute for Peace, Washington, D.C., 2006, p. 309.

³ Raphael Perl, *Trends in Terrorism: 2006*, CRS Report for Congress, 21 July 2006.

Terrorism has been a worrying factor for Bangladesh. It is a lethal offshoot of political use of religion, defective education system and the socio-economic backwardness of the country. It generates national security threats, creating bottlenecks in socio-economic and political development. Despite many operational successes by the government of Bangladesh and law enforcement agencies, they have achieved limited success in disrupting terrorist contrives, ideologies, motivations and networking. Evidently, a few of terrorist groups in Bangladesh have been attempting to regroup, and networking in different names and structure. Some of the new Islamist groups like *Allahr Dal*, *Hizbut Tauhid*, and *Hizbut Tahrir* have emerged in Bangladesh preaching ideologies by training, distributing books and pamphlets among the common people and educational institutions, mainly in rural areas.⁴ It has been reported that *Hizbut Tauhid* organised a four-day training programme on board of a Boat on 4-7 April 2007 to disseminate ideologies and operational techniques. The most frightening part is that the group leaders prefer female trainees to motivate the local people, especially the local women.⁵ Thus, the recent indicators suggest that terrorist threats to Bangladesh remain foremost among its national security challenges. As such, the government would need to maintain maximum monitoring, and operational and strategic efforts to counter the constant evolution and adaptive capability of terrorist groups in Bangladesh. To support these efforts, one has to understand the threat level, group's intention and capabilities, and risks factors. Such being the necessity, this paper attempts to map out the level of terrorism threats, challenges, risk factors for Bangladesh and the possible responses to minimise its impact on the society.

This paper is split into six sections. The second section attempts to elaborate the concept of threat assessment to understand the threat indicators. The third section examines the threat indicators in the context of Bangladesh in order to create an adequate level of awareness and preparedness that is critically needed for the country.

⁴ The law enforcement agencies captured ten members of different Islamist groups while distributing Jihadi materials. *The Daily Star*, 26 January 2008.

⁵ See, for details, Sohrab Hossain, "Militants Preaching Jihad in Patuakhali", *The Daily Star*, 19 January 2008.

The fourth section highlights certain government initiatives and their limitations in facing the menace of terrorism. The fifth section analyses the threat level based on available indicators and applying SWOT⁶ tools. In the conclusion, some recommendations are put forward in order to minimise the negative impact of terrorism on the society.

2. CONCEPTUALIZING THREAT ASSESSMENT

Terrorism is a threat to a wide range of national security goals. This threat perception is concurrent with terrorists' methods of operation, saliency of enemy and the treatment which is correlated with the counter terrorism efforts. A study focuses on early warning indicators of emerging terrorist threat for effective counter terrorism.⁷ So, it is important to understand threat, threat sources, and determinants of terrorism. Although threat differs from place to place and time to time, the perception of threat includes analysis of the indicators and vulnerabilities. Identifying these indicators is the first step in the threat assessment methodology. Risk is the likelihood of a given threat sources exercising a particular potential vulnerability. Many use risk assessment to determine the extent of the potential threat and the vulnerabilities associated with. Vulnerability is a weakness that can be accidentally triggered or intentionally exploited. A threat source does not present a risk when there is no vulnerability. In determining the likelihood of a threat, one must consider threat sources, potential vulnerabilities, and existing preventive mechanisms.

Again, threat assessment is the process of identifying risk, and taking steps to minimise the threat and its impact on the society to an

⁶ A SWOT (Strength, Weakness, Opportunity and Threat) mode of analysis is used to understand the compelling indicators to assist strategic planning process. It is a listing of strengths and opportunities as well as the weaknesses and threats of the current process in order to develop future strategies.

⁷ Chrisman Willard George, "Abstract", International Terrorism Threat Analysis, Master's Thesis, Naval Postgraduate School Monterey Calif, available at:
<http://stinet.dtic.mil/oai/oai?verb=getRecord&metadataPrefix=html&identifier=ADA039928>, accessed on 12 March 2008.

acceptable level. It is the process that allows security experts/law enforcing agencies to secure the state by adopting protective measures. The US Department of Homeland Security defines threat assessment as “a systematic effort to identify and evaluate existing or potential terrorist threats to a jurisdiction and its target assets. Due to the difficulty in accurately assessing terrorist capabilities, intentions, and tactics, threat assessments may yield only general information about potential risks.”⁸ A constant and complete threat analysis with the combination of intelligence and technologies is essential for an effective counter terrorism effort.

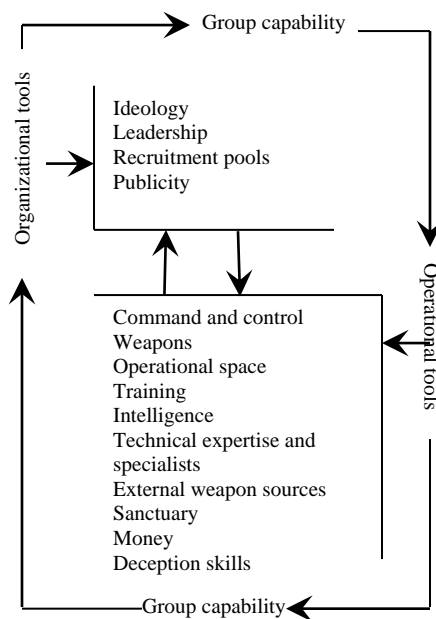


Figure-1: Factors that influence terrorist groups’ capabilities⁹

Threat sources are essential part of the threat assessment. The important threat sources are motivation, resources and threat action for carrying out an operation. The analysis of motivation, resources,

⁸ Alberto R. Gonzales, Regina B. Schofield, Domingo S. Herraiz, “*Assessing and Managing the Terrorism Threat*”, the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, September 2005, p. 6.

⁹ Prepared by author, based on Kim Cragin and Sara A. Daly, *The Dynamic Terrorism Threat*, RAND, 2004, p. xiv.

and capabilities is required in order to determine the likelihood of threat, and listing the immediate threat sources. One must need to compile those indicators to identify the risk and its level by examining threat sources. For example, although successive attacks in Europe in 2003 demonstrated the al-Qaeda's intentions, capabilities, and opportunities for further attack, the European law enforcement agencies, intelligence, and security forces did not take the threat seriously.¹⁰ As a result, several subsequent terrorist attacks took place in 2004 and 2005 in Europe.

The threat assessment framework must incorporate the comprehensive facts and profiles, review and analysis of trends, and activities of state and non-state agencies and their drivers. The figure-1 shows both organizational and operational factors like ideological motivation, leadership pattern, recruitment pools, publicity, command and control mechanism, operational space, training, technical know how, external weapon sources, and financial sources, etc. have influenced terrorist groups' intents and capabilities.

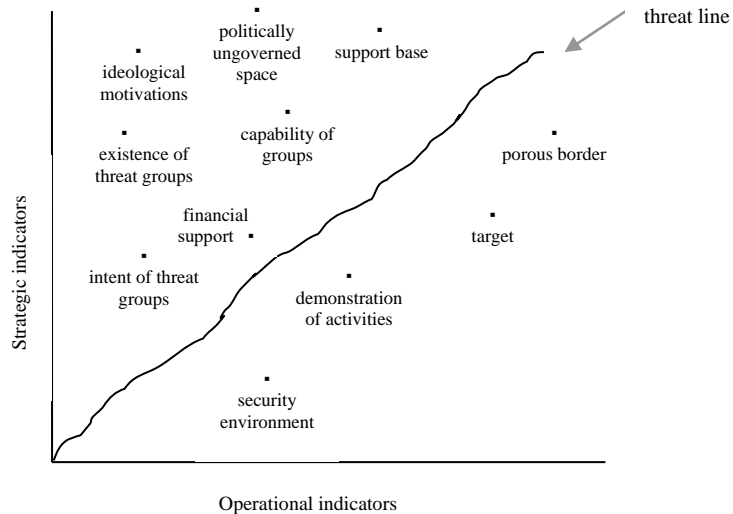


Figure 2: Determining indicators of threat levels

¹⁰ Rohan Gunaratna, "The Post-Madrid Face of Al Qaeda", *the Washington Quarterly*, vol. 27, no. 3, Summer 2004, pp. 91-100.

Figure-2 shows several strategic and operational determining factors of threat level that need to be understood in designing a counter terrorism strategy. An effective terrorism threat assessment framework includes at least seven determining indicators: (i) existence of terrorist group in a given locality, (ii) the capability of a terrorist group to carry out an attack, (iii) evidence of group activities, (iv) intent of a group to conduct terrorist activities, (v) demonstrated terrorist activities, (vi) availability of credible information or intelligence activities that indicates preparations for specific terrorist operations by a suspect group, and (vii) political and security posture of the given area.¹¹ Therefore, the threat assessment framework must need to take into account all strategic, operational and tactical factors, as well as all new trends in terrorist activities that are increasingly networked, more diverse in terms of motivations, financing, and security implications.

3. THREAT INDICATORS FOR BANGLADESH

According to the above-mentioned indicators, the probability of the potential terrorist threat cannot be ignored in Bangladesh. The existence of the terrorist groups and evidence of their activities are noticeable in the country. According to a study on threat prediction for 2008-2015 for Bangladesh, terrorism scores very high in the lists of threat to national security of the country.¹² Due to the continuous drive by the law and security forces, the extremist groups are moving in slow pace. But many banned militant groups are still regrouping by changing their names and operation techniques. The following section attempts to address current trends of terrorism in Bangladesh to understand the threat in a framework.

The presence of the extremist groups in a certain territory and its neighbours is the foremost indicator to understand the threat of terrorism. Bangladesh fits very well in this ground. Over time, due to

¹¹ <http://www.globalsecurity.org/security/systems/threat-assessment.htm>, accessed 12 March 2008.

¹² Lt General ATM Zahirul Alam, “National Security of Bangladesh: Challenges and Options”, the keynote paper for the Independence Day Commemorative Seminar on *National Security of Bangladesh: Challenges and Options*, organized by the Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies, 30 March 2008.

the political use of religion and the presence of ungoverned political spaces in the state domain, the extremists' activities have increased in Bangladesh. The country has been experiencing two types of extremism. First, the Islamist extremism by the right-wing Islamist groups, and the second is political extremism by the ultra-left-wing political groups. Most of the groups' tactics are to create a fear of violence in Bangladesh by assassinating public figures and bombing public places. The menace of political violence is a historical phenomenon. The ultra-left-wing activities originated since the Independence of the country whereas the religion based violence activities originated before Independence. However, extremist groups are operating in Bangladesh in different names and forms. Although the total number is not reported, the active groups those are pursuing currently their goals are: *Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami-Bangladesh (HuJIB)*, *Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB)*, *Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh (JMJB)*, *Hizbut Tauhid (HT)*, *Allahr Dal (AD)*, *Hizb-ut-Tahrir (HuT)*, *Purba Banglar Communist Party (PBCP)*, *Red Flag (RF)*, *Gono Mukti Fouz (GMF)*, *Biplobi Communist Party (BCP)*, *Purbo Banglar Sabrahara Party (PBSP)*, *Janajuddho*, *Gono Bahini (GB)*, *Mukti Bahini (MB)* etc. Box-1 shows different proscribed groups, many of them are still active in different names and forms. The religion based extremist groups are operating across the country and the ultra-leftist groups are concentrating mainly in the north and south western districts of the country. It has been recently documented that the ultra-leftist groups are trying to expand their networking and activities. For instances, BCP, *Gono Bahini*, GMF and the *Mukti Bahini* are regrouping in the south-western districts to strengthen their capability.¹³ It is also alleged that the PBCP has regrouped in Khulna City and establishing network to the different areas of Sirajganj, Natore, Manikganj, Rajbari and Pabna districts.¹⁴

¹³ See, for details, *The Daily Star*, Internet Edition 4 March, 12 & 14 June, 2008. Available at:

(i) <http://www.thedailystar.net/story.php?nid=25971/>, accessed on 19 June 2008.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

Box-1: Some of the proscribed groups in Bangladesh

1. Shahadat-e-Al-Hikma (S-e-H)	9. The Purbo Banglar Communist Party-ML (PBCP-ML)
2. Al Haramaine Islamic Foundation (AHIF)	10. PBCP-Janajuddha
3. Jagrata Muslim Janata, Bangladesh (JMJB)	11. PBCP- Red Flag
4. Jamat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB)	12. PBCP- Communist War
5. Harkat-ul-Jehad Al Islami-Bangladesh (HuJIB)	13. New Biplobi Communist Party (NBCP)
6. Gono Mukti Fouz (GMF)	14. Biplabi Anuragi
7. Gono Bahini (GB)	15. Chinnamu Communist Party (CCP)
8. Biplobi Communist Party (BCP)	16. Sharbahara People's March

On the other hand, there are two types of area where most of the religion based extremist groups are conducting their activities: (i) the strategic vicinity where groups take decisions, maintain command and control, conduct training and ideological motivations, and regroup when necessary, etc. and (ii) the operational vicinity where they conduct their targeted operations. Strategic environment mainly covers rural and far-flung areas, *chars* and *haors*, etc. These areas are mainly chosen to escape from the security forces. The operational areas are public and cultural places, areas of public institutions and infrastructures, etc. Furthermore, the number of power-seeking extremists is increasing in Bangladesh. They try to capture political and social power through the use of violence in the society. They frequently display their political and economic strength in the form of arranging meeting, procession, and participating in electoral activities in Bangladesh. The power seeking leaders, who want to use religion as a tool, are facilitating extremism in the society. Religious and political ideological contradictions, rigid religious beliefs, socio-economic factors like poverty, unequal job opportunities, hunger, backwardness and unemployment have also significantly contributing to the rise of extremism in Bangladesh.

Beside these rightist and ultra-leftist groups, some insurgent groups such as Parbatya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samity (PCJSS), Rohingya Solidarity Organization (RSO), etc. are also seen to be active in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Although the Peace Accord was signed in 1997, there has been concern and possibility of a return to violence. Following the signing of the Accord, any threat assessment

was hardly found to have been done in order to understand the possibilities of threats in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. The RSO is also a formidable group, which has come from Myanmar. It has been alleged that this group has links with extremist groups in Southeast and Central Asia. The India's North-Eastern insurgent groups are also alleged to be engaged in conducting arms training in different areas of Chittagong and Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh.¹⁵

Groups' activities and capabilities are another significant indicator to understand terrorism threat. It has been observed that many extremist groups have carried out their activities across the country. They recently have changed their recruiting pools. Currently, they are recruiting new members by religious propaganda through distributing pamphlet, handbills, books, CD-ROM, etc. According to the *Daily Star* report, the dispersed members of extremist groups are now regrouping in their former places, mainly in the areas of three south-Western districts namely Kushtia, Meherpur, and Chuadanga.¹⁶ However, the security forces have captured second front-line leaders of different groups and recovered grenades and bombs from different places of the country. A second front-line leader of a proscribed Islamist extremist group HuJIB, Abu Zindal, was arrested from Gazipur on 14 February 2008. Following his statement, security forces also captured Md. Nazrul Islam Gharami from a far-flung village of Satkhira. Subsequently, based on their confession, law enforcement forces carried out raid and recovered 41 Arges powerful grenades from the underside of the ground near a pond. It was alarmingly found that the grenades recovered from Satkhira were recently manufactured, and planned to demonstrate groups' presence and strength, particularly in the situations when the top leaders of the different militant groups were hanged or detained. It has been noticed that some of the comparatively new extremist groups are active and showing their capability. The groups like *Allar Dal* and *Hizbut Tauhid* are trying to

¹⁵ Abdur Rob Khan, "National Security of Bangladesh: A Non-Traditional Security Approach", paper presented at the Independence Day Commemorative Seminar on *National Security of Bangladesh: Challenges and Options*, organized by the Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies, 30 March 2008.

¹⁶ *The Daily Star*, 26 January 2008.

reinforce their network. These groups are almost legally operating their activities since they are not yet proscribed by the government. Evidence shows that some of these groups were very active and held public demonstration against the *Shaptahik 2000* and the *Daily Prothom Alo* over the sensitive issues. It has also found that some of the detained activists planned to revolt in Chittagong jail and some also threatened to fire the *Petrobangla* building.¹⁷ Again, three small bombs were found at railway stations in Dhaka, Chittagong and Sylhet. However, all these evidences show the capability and strength of the extremist groups to carry out any fresh attack.

The motivation factors are also important indicator that can be used by the group leaders to strengthen their organizational capability. Mainly, some distorted ideologies and principles which are not supported by the religious scripts have been motivating group members. There are different kinds of motivations and strategic factors causing extremism and violence in Bangladesh, such as (i) ideological motivation, (ii) experimental and destructive motivation, (iii) profit-driven motivation, and (iv) motivation to achieve acknowledgement. There are other related factors that can also generate extremist motivation, like (i) un-uniformed national education structure and curricula, (ii) proliferation of unregulated religion-based institutions and organizations, particularly in rural areas, (iii) rigid religious beliefs and grievances, (iv) misinterpretation of religious ideologies that justifies violence and extreme activities, (v) wide spread poverty and illiteracy of the mass people, (vi) political instability, (vii) violent radicalization of individuals or groups, and (viii) international connectivity, etc. The existing four streams of education in Bangladesh are in contrast with the Constitutional obligations of the unitary form of education. Both secular and religiously fundamental components are inbuilt in education system. The religious schools, approximately numbered 64,000,¹⁸ are divided into two distinct categories. The *Aliya madrassas* are run by the government support and control, and teach Arabic, religious theory and other Islamic subjects as well as English, mathematics, science and history. The *Qaumi madrassas* are

¹⁷ *The Daily Shamokal*, 12 October 2007 and *the Daily Star*, 11 October 2007.

¹⁸ *The Daily Star*, 19 February 2006.

more traditional, and teach Islamic literature and ideologies, *Sharia* law, Arabic and Urdu languages, etc. In most of the cases, after finishing education, students are incapable of taking up any mainstream profession, and *madrassas* and the religious institutions are main sources of their employment. There are also elementary level religious schools in Bangladesh known as *maktabs*, or *ibtedai madrassas* running since 1978. However, the entire religious education system is poorly equipped to increase the capacity of students. The scope of standard education in *madrassa* is available only to a few. They can be easily motivated by capitalizing religious sentiment to create extremism.

The presence of threat groups and insurgent activities in the neighbouring countries is also a threat indicator. Bangladesh is not immune from these challenges. There are several insurgents groups in the Indian North-eastern areas running their activities very near to the Bangladesh-India border. This problem multiplies due to the porous border, incomplete demarcation and absence of effective border mechanisms, illegal activities on the border, and the lack of mutual trust, etc. In some cases, the difficult hilly terrain makes it more complicated to establish control over the border to check illegal crossing from Myanmar and India. The maritime borders are also not fully protected. Bangladesh's coastal belts are highly vulnerable for two reasons: first, the coastal areas can be used as strategic vicinity to take decisions, training and motivations for terrorist groups' and second, these areas are easily accessible by the foreign sources making the most use of the maritime routes. Particularly, the open Sea Islands are highly vulnerable to the potential use of the threat groups. For instance, among others, *Kutubdia* and *Moheshkhali* are the two likely open Sea Islands that can be extremely exploited by the threat groups.

4. THE GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

Terrorists take advantages from the weaknesses of a state or a government to finance, organize, equip, train, recruits, carry out attacks, and hide from the capture by the law and security forces. Therefore, understanding the government response is a vital factor to assess terrorism threats for a country. The government is responsible to take the most appropriate steps to protect its citizens from the

threats of terrorism. Again, the government is well placed to assess the threat for the country. The government responses to the threat of terrorism can be seen at different levels – operational activities by law enforcement and security agencies, legislations, international co-operation, tactical methods, new ideas to combat the root causes of terrorism, etc. Thus, the government is in a position to develop a comprehensive counter terrorism strategy with the help of other non-state actors.

The Bangladesh government has been implementing several plans and strategies to counter idiosyncratic nature of terrorism threat in the country. The government initiatives can be categorized into two types: (i) operational drives by the law and security forces, and (ii) legal initiatives. During 2002-2003, operations ‘clean heart’ and ‘spider web’ were launched to capture threat elements in the society. The law and security forces achieved some operational success in disrupting command and control structure of several extremist groups. A large number of extremist leaders and activists have been captured, put on trial and executed. A great deal of arms, explosives and grenades have been recovered. In the past one year, the security forces have arrested 153 leaders and/or activists from both the right-wing and ultra-left-wing extremist groups. But their success in other operational spheres like disrupting financial and support bases, profiling terrorist individuals, groups, and organizations, and mapping out vulnerabilities and opportunities of threat, etc. is limited. In most of the cases, the government has taken coercive, peace, amnesty and negotiating approaches to minimise the terrorist threat.¹⁹

The government has enacted a few special legislations to counter the threat of terrorism in Bangladesh. On 11 June 2008, the Anti-Terrorism Ordinance 2008 was approved by the government with the provisions of penalty for offences like arms running and financing terror attacks, and committing murders to create panic and endanger the country's sovereignty.²⁰ The new counter terrorism legislation has kept maximum punishment - a death sentence - for terrorist

¹⁹ Abul Kalam, “The Challenges of Terrorism: Bangladesh Responses”, in Moni, SD. (ed) *Responding to Terrorism in South Asia*, Monohar, New Delhi, 2006.

²⁰ *The Daily Star*, 18 June 2008.

activities. Besides, there are provisions to punish individuals for any kind of association with proscribed organizations and for carrying out propaganda on behalf of such organizations. The new law has recognized that financing terrorism is a subject liable to punishment. Any individuals and organizations involved in financing terrorism will be punished. There is a provision for the creation of special tribunals in the new law to prosecute individuals charged under this law. The Bangladesh Bank has been delegated with the responsibility of monitoring and countering the financing of terrorism.²¹ Earlier, the Bangladesh government also approved the Anti-Money Laundering Prevention Ordinance 2008 with effect from 13 April 2008.²² Despite the shortcomings in and confusion over these two Ordinances, Bangladesh has got a strong legal leverage to prevent terror financing activities. It is not enactment, but the problem comes from the implementation deficits. On many counts, different provisions of the laws remain unimplemented.

For that reason, the government institutions have a vital role in implementing strategies and legal provisions. In this regard, the architecture of different institutions and agencies are important to combat the menace of terrorism. The Bangladesh Police, the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), Bangladesh Rifles (BDR), armed forces and intelligence agencies are mainly responsible for fighting terrorism and insurgency. Apart from keeping the law and order, Bangladesh police is recovering illegal arms and explosive and arresting leaders and activists of different terrorist groups. It has been frequently argued that the police is not that well equipped to deal with the new trends of terrorism which is now more ideology- and technology-centric. Apart from ensuring border security, BDR has been playing an active role in fighting against terrorism related activities in the country. Subsequently, RAB was created to reinforce the operational drive by the government. The RAB has been engaged with the protection of internal security, recovery of unauthorized arms, ammunition, explosive, assisting other law enforcement agencies, intelligence gathering, carrying out surveillance in the crime prone

²¹ *The Daily Prothom Alo*, 13 June 2008. Available at: http://www.prothom-alo.com/archive/news_details_mcat.php?dt=2008-06, accessed on 20 June 2008.

²² *The New Nation*, 3 March 2008.

areas, etc.²³ Military forces and intelligence agencies are critically important to combat threat of terrorism. The armed forces are mainly providing intelligence gathering support, training support, backing and logistics support to other law enforcement and paramilitary forces. The armed forces of Bangladesh also provide training to police, paramilitary and other law enforcement forces to carry out operations against threat activities. The intelligence agencies are essential apparatus in support of operational activities. Mainly, the National Security Intelligence (NSI), the Directorate General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI), services intelligence, Special Branch of Police and the RAB intelligence wing, etc. have been working in support of civil administration to identify the potential threat sources and conducting operational activities. In May 2004, NSI constituted a separate body called ‘counter terrorism cell’ to identify specific risk population and areas, and threat groups. The ‘counter terrorism bureau’, another body under the auspices of DGFI, has been working to evaluate, analyse, and frame counter terrorism policy at strategic and operational level.²⁴

As it has been observed, there are several deficiencies at different levels of anti-terrorism manoeuvres. First, the profiling of threat groups and the early detection indicators are not sufficient to face new actors and techniques of terrorism. There is a lack of knowledge and understanding of the ideologies, organizations and operations of the threat groups. Second, the law enforcement agencies do not have close link with the other service sectors to identify suspicious activities to prevent terrorist activities. Third, the government is not strategically, operationally, and tactically fully capable of handling the problem. The Bangladesh government is not sufficiently addressing strategic issues like dismantling motivation, ideologies and support base of the threat groups. Operationally, law enforcement agencies are not adequately developed in dealing with the technology of terrorism. At a tactical level, there is very limited scope for the members of law enforcement, security and intelligence services to be trained or retrained to understand and respond to the threat of terrorism. A number of inadequacies have been identified in

²³ M. Sakhawat Hussain, “Capacity Building of Law Enforcement and Intelligence Agencies” in Farooq Sobhan, ed., *Counter Terrorism in Bangladesh*, University Press Limited, Dhaka, 2008, p. 61.

²⁴ *Ibid*, p. 70.

the armed forces, such as short supply of trained manpower in counter terrorism, lack of intelligence gadgets and equipment, inexperience in anti-money laundering, information insecurity, etc. Fourth, there is a lack of general consensus for all-out drive against terrorism and extremism. Fifth, there is a very limited initiative to educate formally and informally professional groups like academics, media community, service sector officials, and political leaders to be aware of and sensitized about the terrorist activities.

Sixth, the overall strategic responses are still inadequate. The counter ideology or motivations and de-radicalization measures are almost absent in the architecture of maximum institutions. In fact, there is hardly any institution in Bangladesh to address different kinds of motivation factors, like ideological and experimental motivation, destructive and profit driven motivation, motivation to gain acknowledgement, etc. Furthermore, there are poor commitments in political society, lack of coordination among the anti-terrorist alliances, insufficient role of academics and media to address the challenges of extremism and terrorism. Seventh, there is a tendency to overemphasise military and coercive approaches in dealing with terrorism issues. There is no dedicated research institution in the government to provide forum for understanding and research on critical issues of terrorism in Bangladesh. Although the counter terrorism bureau of DGFI is responsible for policy related activities, it is barely possible to workout a viable strategy by a body of armed forces alone. Finally, it may be mentioned that, in Bangladesh, strategies and policies are preoccupied with process, highly centralized, overly bureaucratic, too ambiguous, unaccountable and unresponsive. Most of the initiatives are overly focusing on macro issues, not on micro issues and actors like ideology, motivation, and propaganda activities, empowerment of the individual, etc. to promote counter terrorism discourse.

5. THREAT LEVEL IN BANGLADESH

With the threat indicators identified and analysed above, it is now appropriate to determine the level of terrorism threat in Bangladesh, which may help in designing a viable counter-terrorism strategy. If we start with the '*Udichi*' bomb blast of 1999 in Dhaka, the impact of the events of 9/11 and the subsequent US-led global war on terrorism and the continuous operational drive by the law

enforcement agencies, where does Bangladesh stand? Has the risk of terrorism diminished or increased? Have the plans and abilities of radical groups to conduct terrorist acts reduced or increased? What is the possibility of any further attack? This section attempts to address these questions by using the Aon terrorism risk map 2007 and SWOT analysis.

Terrorism Risk Map 2007 and Bangladesh

The Aon Corporation²⁵ has published terrorism risk map 2007 that provides a visual guide to understand the risk management calculating threats in over 200 countries. It shows the changing trends of the terrorism threat level for 2007 indicating a major downfall of the world wide umbrella groups. Particularly these groups are increasingly splintered and have a hard time in coordinating their plans and activities. This has reduced the terrorism threat in some areas. However, despite increasing cooperation among states and international agencies, the efforts directed against one threat groups in a particular place have not been effective at regional and international level. According to the map, the risk of terrorism since 2006 has decreased in 23 countries and the risk level elevated in 22 countries. Bangladesh falls in the list of states where terrorism threat level has increased along with other states such as India, Iran and four Western countries- UK, France, Norway and Canada (see box-2). In the map, states are coloured according to the level of threat conditions, and various symbols demonstrate different types of terrorist groups. The global cities with high risk are also highlighted.

Box-2: States where terrorism threat level raises

Canada	Nigeria
Norway	Somalia
United Kingdom	Sudan
France	Tunisia
Thailand	Central African Republic
Bangladesh	Ethiopia
India	Morocco
Nepal	Libya
Sri Lanka	Columbia
Iran	Eritrea
United Arab Emirates	Chad

²⁵ The Aon Corporation is a London based world leading risk management organization, See, www.aon.com, accessed on 28 March 2008.

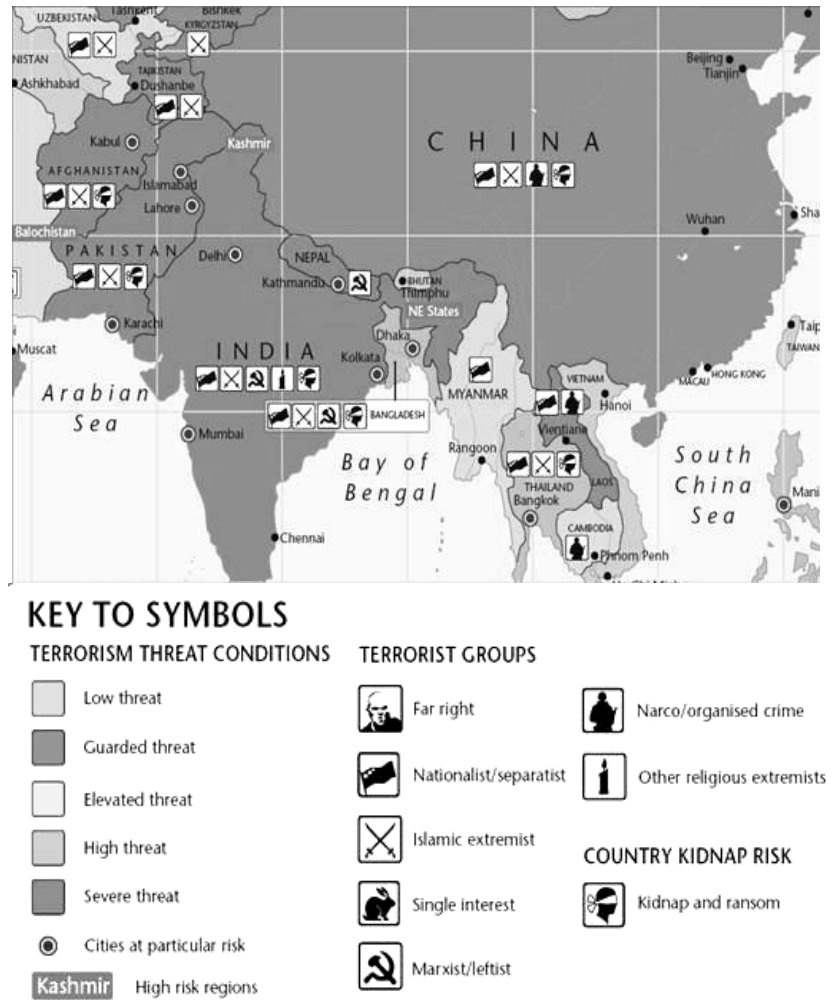


Figure- 3: Terrorism Risk Map 2007²⁶

The Likelihood of Terrorism Threat - SWOT Analysis

The SWOT mode of analysis is a straightforward model for identifying internal factors - the strengths and weaknesses - and external factors - the opportunities and threats presented by the

²⁶ The Aon Corporation, 2007. Available at: www.aon.com, accessed on 28 March 2008.

outside environment. It helps provide direction and serves as a basis for developing future strategic plans. This mode of analysis can also be effective to identify strengths and weaknesses of state counter terrorism mechanism and to examine the potential opportunities and threats emanating from threat groups. It focuses on these objectives by identifying the strengths i.e. how the state and law enforcement agencies are doing well; weaknesses i.e. what are the limitations of the counter terrorism mechanisms; and by examining opportunities i.e. potential capabilities and intents of the threat groups; and threats i.e. what are the potential risks for a state. The internal factors may include capability, tactics, legislation and experiences of state, politics, poverty and illiteracy, training and coordination capacity, systemic strength, etc. whereas the external factors include the existence of threat groups in a given locality, groups' capability, intention, ideological motivation, technology of terrorism, support base, etc. The results are often presented in the form of a matrix. However, this section attempts to outline Bangladesh's strengths and weaknesses of the counter threat mechanisms, and opportunities of potential threats.

The first element of a SWOT analysis describes the internal strengths. The figure-4 presents the list of strengths and weaknesses of the process, and opportunities for threat groups, and potential threats for Bangladesh. In terms of the quality of the anti-terrorism drives, from this list, it can be seen that Bangladesh has immensely dedicated and motivated workforce to conduct operation against threat groups. Gradually, the capability, knowledge and experiences of the law enforcement agencies are increasing to deal with the groups. Citizen's awareness is also gradually increasing. This is strength for the government and law enforcement agencies to conduct operation against extremist groups. Furthermore, the government has promulgated two special legislations to address legal loopholes. As mentioned earlier, such umbrella laws include the Terrorism Ordinance 2008 and the Anti-Money Laundering Ordinance 2008. Again, the law enforcement agencies have already achieved operational successes through the dismantling of the groups' leadership structure. Besides, the Bangladesh government has proscribed many extremist groups and their activities in Bangladesh, which has contributed to the decline in the operational capability of the threat groups.

Terrorist Threat to Bangladesh: SWOT Analysis	
Strengths	Weakness
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Highly dedicated and motivated workforce ○ Increasing capability of the law enforcement agencies ○ Knowledge/experiences of dealing ○ Awareness of the common people ○ Special law enforcement ○ The terrorism Ordinance 2008 ○ Anti-Money Laundering Prevention Ordinance 2008 ○ Operational success ○ Dismantling group leadership ○ Proscribing threat groups ○ Reducing the operational capability of the terrorist groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Politically ungoverned space or lacuna ○ Political use of religion ○ Lack of coordination among government agencies ○ Massive poverty and illiteracy ○ Disadvantaged remote and coastal belts ○ Insufficient training of security forces ○ Procedural and systemic complicity ○ Financial resource constraints ○ Insufficient research activities ○ Insufficient profiling of threat groups and leaders ○ Inadequate intelligence services ○ Lack of integrated and multi-agency response
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Presence of threat groups ○ Existence of threat group in neighbouring countries ○ Porous borders ○ Capability and intention of the threat groups ○ Ideological motivations ○ Increasing use of technology in terrorism ○ Support base ○ Evidence and history of attack ○ Misinterpretation of religious ideologies ○ Proliferation of un-regulated religious institutions ○ Un-uniformed national education structure ○ Rampant corruption 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The emergence of micro-actors in capability of the terrorist groups ○ Increasing ideological, motivational and propaganda ability ○ Promotion of operational sophistication of terrorist activities ○ Use of modern terrorism technology ○ Global information flow ○ New ideas in planning communications, targeting, and propaganda activities ○ Re-emerging and re-grouping ○ Networking and connectivity among threat groups

Figure-4: Terrorist Threat to Bangladesh-SWOT Analysis

The other internal element of the SWOT analysis is weaknesses in the process. From this outline, one can see many deficits that can be exploited by the different threat groups. The systemic loopholes,

political instability, use of religion, etc. have contributed to the growth and nurturing of the activities and operations of extremist group inside the country. Moreover, the government agencies are less coordinated, insufficiently trained, inadequately served by intelligence services, and also suffer from financial constraints. Socio-economic disadvantages such as massive poverty, illiteracy, etc., are also contributing to the rise of extremism in Bangladesh. Moreover, there are geographical difficulties arising from the remote and coastal belts in the country. Such areas are not well monitored or protected. Often it comes to notice that these areas are exploited by different extremist groups. There are poor documentation in profiling threat groups and activities, and insufficient research activities to address terrorism issues. These weaknesses should be left to further research and analysis in Bangladesh.

The first external element of the SWOT analysis is opportunities that can be exploited by the threat groups. The opportunities include any favourable situation in the country that the threat/extremist groups may gain from. These could range from the existence of the threat groups and the use of new technologies to network building to facilitate further attacks. The figure-4 shows a list of several opportunities that can be utilized by the threat groups in Bangladesh. Specifically, the new capabilities and intentions of the threat groups have seen in Bangladesh. The groups are operating ideological motivation activities, networking and connectivity among themselves. Besides, the presence of threat groups in cross-border locations are also a big opportunity for threat groups. The porous and, in some cases, un-protected borders may contribute to the rise of connectivity between threat groups. The final element of the SWOT analysis is examining the threats that the country faces or may face. Figure-4 reveals the potential threat indicators that may need to account by all the stakeholders. The future terrorist attack may be linked with current trends of activities by the threat groups in the country. Currently, many groups are re-grouping, and recruiting new members. The micro-actors are emerging to rejuvenate the capability of the terrorist groups. The ideological, motivational and propaganda activities are gradually increasing. Perhaps, the threat groups may consider using modern technology in their future attacks. The impact of global information flow and new ideas in planning,

communications, targeting, and propaganda activities, etc. may be contributing factor to the rise of terrorism threat to Bangladesh.

Thus, it is important to note that all initiatives and operations may have some strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges. But it is necessary to identify threat sources to develop a comprehensive counter terrorism strategy. According to the analysis of the threat indicators and applying SWOT tools, currently there are no instantaneous terrorism threats in Bangladesh. The threat of domestic terrorism has significantly reduced since the dismantling of the leadership pattern of the extremist groups. However, all the threat factors, indicators and determinants do still exist in Bangladesh. All in all, the country's strengths are limited, while several weaknesses are still there and opportunities are easily accessible by the threat groups. All these factors together have generated 'elevated threat' to the country.

6. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The extent and nature of terrorist threats have been changing around the world. Bangladesh is not immune from this challenge. The preceding discussion has analysed the activities of different threat groups, indicators of potential threat, and the government responses in order to understand the level of terrorism threat for Bangladesh. Despite all drives against the terrorist groups, many threat indicators are perceptible in the country. Several groups are operating in different scope, capacity and nature. A number of threat indicators have been identified in Bangladesh. Some of these are (i) operations of known and active groups or networks, (ii) stated aims and objectives, (iii) intent of threat groups, (iv) evidence of terrorist activities, and (v) the increase in strategic and operational capabilities of terrorist groups to stage further attacks. On the other hand, the entire government responses to counter terrorism demonstrate the use of 'hard power'²⁷ without addressing the root causes and new trends of terrorism. The 'soft power'²⁸ mechanisms are not being sufficiently addressed in Bangladesh.

²⁷ Action by military forces, intelligence agencies, police and law enforcement agencies, etc.

²⁸ Governance measures, community responses, border control, counter-terrorist financing initiatives, etc.

Taking into account all indicators together, the threat level is increasing in Bangladesh. What should be the way out to face such motivated challenges? Owing to the multi-dimensionality of the problem, it is critically important to explore a viable and effective strategy incorporating short-term, medium-term and long-term goals. The short-term goals include finding out the extremist groups' hideouts, exposing groups' motives, targets, command, control and support infrastructure, responding effectively, efficiently and rapidly by security forces in arresting and bringing them under law, profiling extremist individuals, groups and cases by gathering critical information. These short-term initiatives may contribute to weakening of the threat groups and motivating citizens in combating terrorism. Any failure in this regard may result in further escalation of violence in the society.

The medium-term goals include running an effective oversight and security system, increasing coordination among law enforcement agencies, service sectors, and social forces in order to create an all-inclusive security environment in the country. It is also necessary to ratify and implement regional and international documents relating to the issues of extremism, violence and terrorism. Ultimately, terrorism cannot be prevented by addressing short and medium term goals. There must be long-term and comprehensive goals in order to address the root causes of the problem. The long-term measures should be preventive in nature. It is necessary to establish a general counter terrorism discourse by promoting unity and consensus in the political society of Bangladesh. This unity promoting function is particularly crucial for Bangladesh where ideological zeal, even in a rhetorical form, can provide an outlet for daily social and economic frustrations. Corruption should be addressed on priority basis so that it cannot provide opportunity to further rise in terrorism.

Currently, in the absence of political activities in Bangladesh, the government must look into whether the corrupt money is spent for financing terrorist activities. Some of the long-term goals are (i) modernization of all streams of education; with a view to incorporating substantive secular components. (ii) Reducing economic disparity through social cohesion in order to address the grievances of the deprived citizens. (iii) Promoting microgovernance activities by strengthening community responses, localizing policies,

utilizing local knowledge and capacity. And (iv) identification of 'strategic communication' tools to interact with the extremist individuals and groups to get their message, perceptions and ideas, etc. It can help to design strategic counter terrorism tools in Bangladesh. To defend against these threats and to ensure national security, Bangladesh urgently needs to cope with the shifting trends of terrorism threats, mainly focusing on micro actors and issues.