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Md. Jahan Shoieb

COUNTER-TERRORISM IN BANGLADESH: THE UN GLOBAL COUNTER-TERRORISM STRATEGY IN PERSPECTIVE

Abstract

In recent decades, frequency and scope of terrorism have been intensified and appeared as a major threat to global security, peace, and development. Bangladesh, a developing country of South Asia, has also experienced terrorist incidents of different types in the past couple of decades. The government has taken various measures to dismantle terrorist groups from its territory. Although the country has not experienced any major terrorist attack since the Holey Artisan incident of 2016, still it is not entirely immune from such threats. Hence, the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy (UNGCTS) can play a complementary role in national counter-terrorism endeavours of Bangladesh. Notably, the UNGCTS is one of the key instruments of global counter-terrorism endeavours of the UN, which aims to eradicate root causes of terrorism. This article tries to look into whether the strategy can be an effective one in Bangladesh's context.

Keywords: UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, Terrorism, Counter-terrorism, United Nations

1. Introduction

The unprecedented terrorist attack on 11 September 2001 indeed is not the beginning moment of global terrorism. However, that incident played a massive role in the whole gamut of global terrorism and counter-terrorism. Attack on the world's sole superpower reminds the global community that terrorism is a global phenomenon, can occur anytime and in any part of the world. The magnitude of the attacks also reminds that non-state groups are quite capable of causing colossal damage, and therefore, collective measures are required to dismantle them, and no one should stand aside any more on this particular aspect. In recent years, following the rise of the Islamic State (IS) after 2014, the international community has been facing another wave of threat of terrorism. Nowadays, groups like Al-Qaeda, Boko Haram, or IS often surpass national boundaries, necessitating enhanced cooperation at global level to counter those groups.

In recent decades, threats of terrorism and violent extremism have increased rapidly, and the number of fatalities has risen steadily.[1] One of the most notable

Md. Jahan Shoieb is Research Fellow at Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BIISS). His e-mail address is: jshoieb@gmail.com.

characteristics of contemporary terrorism is that terrorist groups nowadays are of transnational character and often transcend national boundaries. Innovative and new tactics have always helped in their survival or expansion throughout the world. Terrorist groups tend nowadays to abandon their age-old strategy to capture immediate public and media attention due to its ineffectiveness.[2] Contemporary terrorism has several manifestations. Also, frequency of white supremacist and anti-Semitic attacks has been quite noticeable. In 2018, the US Homeland Security Advisory Committee, in a report, mentioned that out of 67 terrorist incidents, six were lethal and involved elements of white supremacists.[3] The terrorist incident in New Zealand in 2019 and the terrorist attack in Norway in 2011 are a few examples of terrorist incidents perpetrated by people of far-right ideology.[4] Although the frequency of terrorist incidents conducted by the far-right is visible at present, it can still not be labelled as a paradigm shift in recent trend of terrorism. After the killing of the group's top leader Abu Bakar Al Baghdadi, the IS' resurgence is another such trend, as his death could not prove that it is the end of the group. Rather, it appears that the group continues to generate fund and is also maintaining and expanding global operations. In 2020, they escalated number of attacks worldwide, particularly in Central Asia, Africa and Middle East.[5] Another trend of terrorism in recent years is the increasing nature of terrorism in Africa. For instance, Al Shabab is getting a strong foothold in Kenya. The nature of terrorism is, it thrives and grows where proper attention is not given. Notably, in 2018, the maximum percentage of terrorist attacks struck South Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa and Middle East.[6]

In Bangladesh, terrorist ideology started to resonate in the 1990s with veterans from Afghanistan who participated in the anti-Soviet war.[7] Since then, the country has experienced numerous small- and large-scale terrorist attacks. Homegrown terrorist groups like the Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh (JMJB),

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[1] John Karlsrud, "Towards UN Counter-terrorism Operations?", *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 38, No. 6, January 2017, pp. 1215-1231.

[2] Bangladesh Institute of Peace and Security Studies (BIPSS), "Splinter Terrorist Groups: Emerging Trends of Terrorism in Bangladesh", available at https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/171215/p1a.pdf, accessed on 26 October 2020.

[3] Bridget Johnson, "6 Terrorism Trends to Watch in 2020", *Homeland Security Today.US*, 11 January 2020, available at https://www.hstoday.us/subject-matter-areas/infrastructure-security/6-terrorism-trends-to-watch-in-2020/, accessed on 18 October 2020.

[4] Seth G. Jones, "The New Zealand Attack and the Global Challenge of Far-Right Extremism", *Center for Strategic & International Studies*, 15 March 2019.

[5] Joseph V. Micallef, "A Year After Al-Baghdadi's Death, ISIS Is Alive and Growing", *Military.Com*, 06 November 2020, available at https://www.military.com/daily-news/opinions/2020/11/06/year-after-al-baghdadis-death-isis-alive-and-growing.html, accessed on 17 May 2021.

[6] Bridget Johnson, op. cit.

[7] Iftekharul Bashar, "Islamic State Ideology Continues to Resonate in Bangladesh", available at https://www.mei.edu/publications/islamic-state-ideology-continues-resonate-bangladesh#_edn6, accessed on 22 October 2020.

Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB), Harkat Ul Jihad Al Islami-Bangladesh (HUJI-B), Ansarullah Bangla Team, and others have emerged as major threats for Bangladesh in past decades. Terrorism in Bangladesh has become a major concern since countrywide sequential bombings in 2005. The Holey Artisan incident in 2016 has attracted global attention. In recent decades, Bangladesh faces sustained threats from terrorist attacks.[8] Recent trends of terrorism in Bangladesh reveal that terrorist groups like Ansar Al Islam (AAI), JMB and Neo-JMB have targeted people of different groups including foreigners, bloggers, intellectuals, secular activists, sectarian and religious minorities.[9]

However, the current government of Bangladesh is vigilant in countering all forms of terrorism and has adopted a "zero-tolerance policy" towards terrorism. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina noted in the 73rd United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) that to counter terrorism, the government would continue its zero-tolerance approach.[10] In the process, the government emphasizes on uprooting the main reasons of terrorism. Simultaneously, it encourages a 'whole-of-society' approach mainly to build a robust defence mechanism against elements of terrorism and violent extremism at the community level.[11] On 07 October 2020, in the Plenary Meeting on "Measures to Eliminate International Terrorism", the Permanent Representative of Bangladesh to the UN Rabab Fatima reiterated Prime Minister's speech and noted that Bangladesh maintained a strict policy to eliminate terrorism and violent extremism.[12] As a UN member, Bangladesh always follows the principles/guidelines of the UN. By following the principles of UNGCTS, it has gained notable successes in countering this global menace.[13] Since the Holey Artisan incident, law enforcement agencies of Bangladesh have undertaken several operations on militants, terrorists and arrested a good number

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[8] Taha Husain, "Counter Terrorism Approaches: With Reference to Bangladesh", *ABC Journal of Advanced Research*, Vol. 6, No. 1, pp. 09-16, 2017

[9] International Crisis Group, *Countering Jihadist Militancy in Bangladesh*, Brussels, Belgium: International Crisis Group, 28 February 2018.

[10] Sheikh Hasina, "73rd Session of the United Nations General Assembly Address by Sheikh Hasina Hon'ble Prime Minister Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh", The United Nations: New York, 27 September 2018", available at https://bdun.org/2018/09/27/73rd-session-of-the-united-nations-general-assembly-address-by-sheikh-hasina-honble-prime-minister-government-of-the-peoples-republic-of-bangladesh-the-united-nations-new-york-27/, accessed on 01 October 2020.

[11] "Statement by Bangladesh", available at https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/ctitf/sites/www.un.org.counterterrorism.ctitf/files/S2-Bangladesh.pdf, accessed on 29 April 2021.

[12] "Bangladesh Rejects Terrorism in all its forms, Manifestations: Envoy", *United News of Bangladesh*, 09 October 2020, available at https://unb.com.bd/category/Bangladesh/bangladesh-rejects-terrorism-in-all-its-forms-manifestations-envoy/58683, accessed on 22 October 2020.

[13] Author's interview with official of the Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC), Dhaka Metropolitan Police, 10 November 2020; U.S. Department of State, "Country Reports on Terrorism, 2013", available at https://2009-2017.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2013/224824.htm, accessed on 18 May 2021.

of suspected terrorists.[14] However, the country is yet to formulate a full-fledged counter-terrorism strategy to eradicate terrorism from its soil.

Since inception, the United Nations (UN) has been performing an important task in protecting global peace and security. It is also working on countering terrorism in various ways. Over the years, it has been playing a crucial role in global norm-setting. When former US President Barack Obama visited the UN in 2014, he noted that to resolve contemporary world problems, including eradicating terrorism, countries would need to work together and try to renew the core objective of the UN's establishment.[15] During the past decades, the UN has taken various measures to enhance state capacity in combating terrorism. It has initiated 16 international treaties to address issues related to terrorism. To date, among all these initiatives, the UNGCTS is a significant one to tackle terrorism. The UNGCTS started its journey on 08 September 2006. Since then, it has appeared as a crucial component of the UN's global counter-terrorism endeavour. The strategy's main focus is to strengthen collective efforts and capacities of states along with those of the UN to combat and prevent terrorism ensuring human rights of individuals and the rule of law. It affirms that terrorism in a first scene can and should not be associated with any religion, ethnic group, civilization, or nationality.[16] As this strategy aims to eradicate terrorism by addressing the root causes, it can eliminate terrorism from Bangladesh by playing a complementary role in its counter-terrorism endeavour.

In these circumstances, this article aims to examine counter-terrorism issues of Bangladesh in line with the UNGCTS. Hence, the key research questions are: what is the counter-terrorism approaches of Bangladesh? To what extent can the UNGCTS play a complementary role in Bangladesh's counter-terrorism Strategy? Although the paper is written based on secondary literature, including books, journals, newspapers, magazines, policy papers, issue briefs, seminar papers, official websites of different stakeholders, interview of a counter-terrorism specialist has been incorporated.

For convenience of discussion, the paper is divided into six sections, including introduction and conclusion. After introduction, section two discusses the state of terrorism and counter-terrorism in Bangladesh. Section three sheds light on exploring the counter-terrorism approaches of Bangladesh, while section four highlights different dimensions of UNGCTS. Section five discusses the relevance of the UNGCTS for Bangladesh. Finally, section six concludes the paper.

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[14] Iftekharul Bashar, op. cit.

[15] Available at https://www.un.org/en/ga/69/meetings/gadebate/24sep/usa.shtml, accessed on 30 November 2020.

[16] Ibid.

2.   State of Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism in Bangladesh

For the last couple of decades, Bangladesh has been experiencing an incremental growth in violent extremism.[17] In Bangladesh, various factors worked as catalysts in increasing radical ideologies. Those are political violence and clashes, conflicts between right and left-wing ideologies, and in some cases, weak governance.[18] Some terrorist groups operate and continue to pose a challenge for Bangladesh, namely, JMB, JMJB, HUJI-B, AAI, and Neo-JMB to mention a few. In recent years, those groups have targeted foreigners, writers, bloggers, and minority groups.

Terrorism in Bangladesh evolved mainly with the rise of global terrorism. Notably, in the 1990s, reports began circulating on bombings targeting Bengali cultural events. The terrorist incident at the Ramna Park during the celebration of 'Pohela Boishakh', and attacks on a rally of the Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) in Paltan in 2001, bomb blasts in cinema halls of Mymensingh on 06 December 2002 are some significant ones. The violence started to escalate with series of bombings and explosions in 2004 that targeted political personalities and government representatives. When the IS declared Caliphate in 2014, its affiliated Neo-JMB started gaining strength in Bangladesh. It started to recruit members from other groups like JMB and AAI. This resulted in the formation of the Neo-JMB. The group is alleged to orchestrate the brutal Holey Artisan attack on 01 July 2016.[19] They also clashed with several law enforcing agencies, and nearly 70 activists of Neo-JMB have been killed in 30 manoeuvers.[20] However, the government of Bangladesh claims that terrorists operating in the country have no link with foreign terrorist groups like the IS or Al-Qaeda.[21] With the vigilant efforts by the country's law enforcement agencies, AAI's spiritual leader Rahmani and some members were sentenced to imprisonment. However, some key members, like the group's spokesperson Abdullah Ashraf and Muhammad Miqaddad, are still unidentified. Despite series of operations in recent years, AAI continued online propaganda efforts that negatively impact the country's law and order situation. Their presence on online platforms becomes evident from their statements and publications of the Bengali Journal named "Al Balagh."[22]

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[17] Shahab Enam Khan, "Bangladesh: The Changing Dynamics of Violent Extremism and the Response of the State", *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, Vol. 28, No. 1, 2017, pp. 191-217.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Shafi Md Mostofa, "What Does COVID 19 Mean for Terrorism in Bangladesh?", *The Diplomat*, 04 June 2020.
[20] Ibid.
[21] US Department of State, "Country Report on Terrorism", available at https://www.state.gov/reports/country-reports-on-terrorism-2019/bangladesh/, accessed on 09 November 2020.
[22] Ibid.

Expansion of online-based radicalization is another feature of terrorism in Bangladesh. Terrorist groups like AAI remain active online. There are approximately 90 million internet users in Bangladesh. In 2017, Bangladesh Police conducted a survey which revealed that among 250 terrorist incidents, propaganda and social networking websites inspired 82 per cent. It also found that 80 per cent used different social networking apps to communicate, including Messenger, Thrima, and WeChat.[23] There is a suspicion that the ongoing global pandemic COVID-19 may contribute to the rise of radical people in Bangladesh in various ways. First, amidst this pandemic, both extremists and their followers have ample time to spend online, and there are reports that they are trying to manipulate the tech world with their full strength.[24] Therefore, this may help them a lot to reach people. Secondly, there is a possibility that young generation may be attacked by frustrations. As a result, they can be attracted to extremist contents. Finally, the pandemic may render doomsday narrative by the extremists. Terrorist groups like the IS and Al Qaeda have already changed narratives in this new-normal world.[25] The groups have labelled the pandemic as a God's soldier and accelerated their recruitment efforts, encouraged attacks, and promoted various fictional theories on COVID-19.[26]

The current government of Bangladesh has taken a strong position in countering terrorism. In recent years and more specifically since the Holey Artisan incident, law enforcing agencies conducted several counter-terrorism operations, neutralized many terrorist cells and Improvised Explosive Design (IED) making units throughout Bangladesh.[27] Some counter-terrorism actions were very complicated which took several days and required the Bomb Disposal Units and Special Weapons And Tactics (SWAT).[28] Recently, police has undertaken a community engagement approach to deter radical and extremist ideologies and advance social awareness campaigns.[29] The anti-terrorism Act of 2009 to date is the most significant stride to the country's counter-terrorism strategy. Notably, the government amended the Act in 2012 and 2013.[30] The amendment in 2012 incorporated death penalty for certain types of crimes. According to the amendment of 2013, any conversation and discussion on Facebook, Skype, Twitter, or any social networking or internet site by terrorists, still picture or video indicating their crimes, presented by law enforcement

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[23] Shafi Md Mostofa and Natalie J. Doyle, "Profiles of Islamist Militants of Bangladesh", *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Vol. 13, No. 5, October 2019, pp. 112-129.
[24] Shafi Md Mostofa, op. cit.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Iftekharul Bashar, op. cit.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Ibid.
[30] US Department of State, op. cit.

agencies before the court for investigation, shall be counted as proof to the court.[31] On 05 April 2018, in line with the Antiterrorism Act, Bangladesh government formed two special tribunals. One of the first cases of Dhaka's tribunal was the six perpetrators for the 2016 Holey Artisan incident. Due to lack of provisions regarding Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTF), law enforcing agencies captured some of the suspected FTFs or facilitators.[32]

"The Country Report on Terrorism-2019", published by the US State Department, mentions that Bangladesh has been preparing a list to alert on suspected terrorists at national level. Mentioning the number of terrorist occurrences increased from previous year, the report noted the situation of terrorism in Bangladesh, including activities of law enforcing agencies, financing in the fight against terrorism, local law and international cooperation in this regard.[33] On Countering Violent Extremism (CVE), the report mentions that Bangladeshi organizations work cooperatively under the Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund (GCERF). This global public-private fund aims to support grassroots and local CVE efforts in communities which are at risk. Ministries are working collaboratively with imams, religious leaders and scholars to raise awareness among people on terrorism. Hence, the police have played a crucial role to counter extremist propaganda by engaging religious leaders, also engaged them to convey messages to the surrendered terrorists and militants that no religion, including Islam, actually supports extremism or terrorism. Bangladesh Police have also undertaken community policing efforts.[34]

3.   Exploring the Counter-Terrorism Approaches of Bangladesh

Bangladesh has been playing a crucial role in countering radicalism and terrorism. The country can be lauded for taking prompt actions through intelligence and law enforcing agencies, security forces, the Home Ministry, judiciary, and some other ministries. In the past years, the private sector, media, NGOs and civil society also played a crucial role. Cooperation between the state and non-state actors has improved. The success story of Bangladesh in combating terrorism is widely appreciated and acknowledged at home and abroad.[35] Hard power approaches have dominated the traditional responses of law enforcement agencies to terrorism in Bangladesh. Although in this part of the world, such approach appears to be an effective one, contemporary discourse on security and counter-terrorism suggests

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[31] "Reflecting on the Anti-Terrorism Act 2009", *The Daily Star*, 03 December 2019.
[32] US Department of State, op. cit.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Farooq Sobhan, "Bangladesh's Counter-terrorism Efforts: The People's Empowerment Model", available at http://bei-bd.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/whc52c2677cd72bb.pdf, accessed on 11 November 2020.

an inclusive and community-based model on countering terrorism resolving the core issues conducive to nourishing terrorism which is proven to be more effective in tackling the threat in the long run.[36] As there are homegrown terrorists in Bangladesh, it needs local people or community to participate in counter-terrorism activities. Cooperative measures, e.g., confidence building among various ethnic groups, political parties, and peoples are important aspects of the community-based approach.[37]

Notably, there are two vital aspects of countering terrorism. First one associates with the use of hard power. Therefore, it is primarily known as offensive measures because it aims to deter, and counter terrorism. The second one is the soft power approach, also known as the conciliatory approach.[38] There are various types of counter-terrorism models. One size fits all strategy does not work for all countries. Thus, countries usually choose a model considering various factors. There is an absence of a clear-cut counter-terrorism model in Bangladesh. However, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's peace model, which she presented at the 66th UNGA held in September 2011, can be considered. The model is primarily based on people's empowerment in a multidimensional democratic approach with seven mutually reinforcing multipliers: eradication of hunger and poverty, creating jobs for all, reduction of inequality from the society, mitigation of deprivation, acceleration of human development, inclusion of excluded people and elimination of terrorism.[39] Later, Bangladesh convened an International Seminar titled "People's Empowerment and Development International Seminar", where Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina once again presented the necessary factors for sustainable peace and empowerment.[40] The model is based on four pillars: economic development, democracy, governance, and social justice. It incorporates a right-based approach in which empowering people to their full potential is the basis of achieving peace and development. In addition to that, the inclusive approach implies a more equitable distribution of wealth, ensuring minority rights and social safety nets for the vulnerable segment of society.

Hence, an analysis on the counter-terrorism component of the people's empowerment model vis a vis the six other peace multipliers help assess how those components play a role in assisting the counter-terrorism endeavour of the country.

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[36] Ibid.

[37] Taha Husain, op. cit.

[38] Michele L. Malvesti, "Bombing Bin Laden: Assessing the Effectiveness of Air Strikes as Counter Terrorism Strategy", *The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs*, Vol. 26, No. 1, January 2002.

[39] Available at https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/717065?ln=en, accessed on 25 November 2020.

[40] Speech by Sheikh Hasina, Prime Minister of the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh in the International Seminar on *People's Empowerment and Development,* 05 August 2012, available at https://pmo.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/pmo.portal.gov.bd/pm_speech/9e8facf3_6851_42d7_89a2_8312 4a050731/empowerment_dev_050812_eng.pdf, accessed on 25 November 2020.

The model primarily aims to promote peace through addressing and removing threats to peace. Elimination of terrorism is one of the prerequisites of peace and development. Hence, if six other multipliers of the model achieved, the country can go a long way to eliminate some elements conducive to instigate terrorism. As terrorism remains a major threat to human security, and while hard power can eliminate terrorism to a certain level, to eliminate terrorism properly, the root causes must be adequately analyzed and addressed.[41] Deprivation of people's legitimate rights and denial of justice, unemployment, discrimination against minorities, and poverty become breeding ground for non-state actors who try to exploit the situation, resort to violent extremism and terrorism. Therefore, besides the hard power approach, six peace multipliers of the people's empowerment model will boost counter-terrorism in two ways.

First, addressing different types of social concerns like inequality, poverty and unemployment, and human development will help restrain the youth who are distressed by the existing socioeconomic condition and are susceptible to be recruited by extremists. Hence, by implementing the model, the government can attract the young generation for a prospective future. Second, the model can help curb the pace of radicalization in Bangladesh to a great extent. Many studies show that radicalization is a process that leads to terrorism, although all radicalized people may not resort to terrorism. However, it can be argued that a radicalized group may destabilize economic and democratic environment of the country. Therefore, human development approach will be important in empowering and educating individuals, ensuring they receive a better standard of living and are well equipped to reject radical or extremist ideology. To tackle terrorism successfully, elements conducive to terrorism and violent extremism must be addressed. Thus, elements of the peace model can be treated as a counter-terrorism model besides the hard power approach.

In the case of Bangladesh, no one can deny the importance of an effective and comprehensive counter-terrorism model. Although the country is yet to formulate a national counter-terrorism strategy, it has undertaken numerous measures to dismantle terrorist networks. The government is currently working to formulate the National Counter Terrorism Strategy for Bangladesh.[42] In this regard, the UN strategy can effectively complement the state capacity. Notably, the strategy identifies a broad range of counter-terrorism measures to promote states' capacity for sustainable development, underpinned by the pledge to defend the rule of law and individual rights. In the following section, a brief overview of the UNGCTS will be given.

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[41] Farooq Sobhan, op. cit.
[42] Author's Interview with CTTC official, op. cit.

4. A Brief Overview of the UNGCTS

In the 21st century, terrorism cannot be eliminated or addressed through the hard power approach alone. Instead, diversified policy responses are required, including development assistance, capacity building, promotion and protection of human rights, enabling state capacity to counter terrorism, and resolving the underlying causes or situation prone to the spread of terrorism.[43] In 2008, on the occasion of first review of the strategy, Denmark's Permanent Representative to the UN noted that it was crucial to enhance cooperation at global level to help developing countries strengthen their capacities. Thus, countries need to eliminate hesitation to combine both the security and development agenda, including enhancing state capacity in counter-terrorism as a vital part of the development agenda, which is a delicate but essential task.[44]

UN's presence in the international arena poses rigorous debates and discussions on its functioning. Its effectiveness is constantly brought into discussions, mainly by liberals and realists arguing in favour or against it. Tim Dunne narrates that the UN is a multipurpose agency that aims to fulfil distinct goals: peacekeeping, collective security, human rights, health, and environmental concerns.[45] As it is mentioned both in "Everyone's United Nations" and "Basic Facts About the United Nations" that the UN as an organization meant to "maintain international peace and security". The discussion of this section primarily is centred on this issue.

Since inception, the UN has been playing a significant role in upholding global peace and security. Several aspects of its peacekeeping efforts carry the testimony. Particularly, coalition-building in the UN Security Council and troop contributions are some functions of the UN which are attributes of liberal institutionalism contributing to global peace. In recent years, counter-terrorism tasks of the UN can be divided into three categories. First is the norm-setting role of the UN that includes a) actions to deter violent extremism and the promotion and development of a counter-terrorism strategy for people, b) adopt necessary international conventions, c) pass Security Council resolutions imposing obligations on counter-terrorism to UN member states. Second is to assist countries in their initiatives to enhance capacities to address those obligations, and third, sanctions mandated by the UN Security Council.[46]

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[43] Jason Ipe, James Cockayne and Alistair Millar, "Implementing the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy in West Africa", *Centre on Global Counterterrorism Cooperation*, September 2010.
[44] Carsten Staur, "Remarks on behalf of Denmark on the Occasion of the First Review of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy", September 2008.
[45] Tim Dunne, Milja Kurki and Steve Smith, *International Relations Theories: Discipline and Diversity*, Second Edition, New York: Oxford University Press, 2010.
[46] Sebastian Von Einsiedel, "Assessing the UN's Efforts to Counter Terrorism", *United Nations University*

The UNGCTS is primarily a set of measures that aim to mitigate original causes responsible for spreading terrorism. Other objectives of the strategy include enhancing states' capacities in counter-terrorism, enabling effectiveness of the UN system in eradicating terrorism by assisting states in their capacity building initiatives, ensuring due respect and care to human rights for all people and simultaneously ensuring the rule of law as the core principle while combating terrorism.[47] Usually, every two years, the UNGCTS is reviewed and required amendments are done to resolve newly evolved challenges. The UNGA adopted the strategy and resolution in September 2008 after its first formal review. There are four pillars of the UNGCTS which comprises: a) measures to address conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism; b) measures to prevent and combat terrorism; c) measures to build states' capacity to prevent and combat terrorism and to strengthen the roles of the UN in that regard; and d) measures to ensure respect for human rights for all and the rule of law as the fundamental basis for the fight against terrorism.[48] In June 2017, the UNGA took a step to assist member states in implementing the UNGCTS. In this regard, it passed resolution 71/291. In line with the resolution, the office on counter-terrorism was established and simultaneously, an Undersecretary General was also appointed to enhance the office's ability and meet the growing demands of global community. UN member states receive required policy support from the Office of Counter-Terrorism, and it simultaneously disseminate in-depth knowledge of the UNGCTS, and wherever necessary, expedite delivery of technical assistance to implement the four pillars.[49] The office's activities also encompass issues like engaging parliament, border security, sports and security, terrorist travel, countering terrorist financing, cybersecurity, national PVE action plans, WMD/CBRN terrorism, prison management, and south-south cooperation.

Despite challenges of COVID-19, restrictions on large gatherings or public meetings and office works, the 7th biannual review of the UNGCTS took place in 2020. In the last review, two countries, Egypt and Spain, were co-facilitators of the negotiation process. However, they often face criticisms due to unsatisfactory track record on core issues of the strategy. Particularly, Egypt has become a subject of sustained criticism for targeting the members of civil society and human rights activists under the banner of regulating human rights.[50]

Centre for Policy, 08 October 2016.

[47] Eric Rosand, Alistair Millar and Jason Ipe, "Implementing the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy in the Latin America and Caribbean Region", *Center on Global Counterterrorism Cooperation,* available at https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/91416/latin_america.pdf, accessed on 03 September 2020.

[48] Fatima Al-Wahaidy, "UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy: All You Need to Know," *Egypt Today*, 04 August 2017.

[49] Available at https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/what-we-do, accessed on 30 November 2020.

[50] Fionnuala Ní Aoláin, "Negotiating a Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy in a Time of COVID-19", available at https://www.justsecurity.org/69408/negotiating-a-global-counter-terrorism-strategy-in-a-time-of-covid-19/,

Since 2018, little has fundamentally changed in discussion of human rights and counter-terrorism. However, due to the COVID-19, an obvious challenge emerged in effectively negotiating the strategy, which means relevant actors will receive fewer opportunities to engage each other in the bargaining processes to reduce the differences. This will simultaneously shrink opportunities for civil society and experts to strengthen the pillars of the UNGCTS.

5.   Relevance of the UNGCTS for Bangladesh

Since the Holey Artisan incident in 2016, Bangladesh has not experienced any major terror attack/incident apart from few lone-wolf attacks, reflected in the Global Terrorism Index-2019, where Bangladesh is ranked 31.[51] Nevertheless, the risk of terrorism cannot be totally nullified in Bangladesh.[52] Currently, terrorism is a matter of concern for Bangladesh, which needs to be addressed by relevant stakeholders.[53] The UNGCTS can mitigate existing gap in policy and strategy. As there is no policy-related challenge in implementing the UNGCTS in the country, it can bolster the counter-terrorism endeavour.[54] Bangladesh has engaged deeply with the UN in its CVE and Counter-terrorism (CT) endeavour over the years. Thus, its position fits well in the broader spectrum of the UNGCTS, which the UNGA had adopted by consensus in 2006.[55] In this regard, the four pillars of the UNGCTS can be reviewed and analyzed to see whether those are relevant to Bangladesh.

5.1   *Pillar I: Measures to Address the Conditions Conducive to the Spread of Terrorism*

One of the essential aspects of Bangladesh's counter-terrorism is that the government's responses are primarily reactive rather than preventive. Hence, the aspect of addressing the root causes of terrorism needs more attention.[56] Intelligence analysts in Bangladesh raised concerns about the interface between political violence, criminality and militant groups, and the local and transnational organized criminal network in supporting terrorist activity in Bangladesh.[57] They also found that state's

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accessed on 02 March 2021.

[51] Global Terrorism Index, available at https://knoema.com/atlas/topics/World-Rankings/World-Rankings/Global-terrorism-index, accessed on 29 November 2020.

[52] Author's Interview with CTTC official, op. cit.

[53] Ibid.

[54] Ibid.

[55] "Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism (CT and CVE)", available at https://bdun.org/bangladesh-priorities-at-the-un/countering-terrorism-and-violent-extremism-ct-and-cve/, accessed on 26 May 2021.

[56] Naureen Chowdhury Fink, *Bombs and Ballots: Terrorism, Political Violence, and Governance in Bangladesh*, International Peace Institute Publication: New York, February 2010.

[57] Ibid.

vulnerabilities, including a porous border, lack of bilateral or regional mechanisms to cooperate on counter-terrorism and criminal investigations, make it an appropriate transit point for different types of criminals and narcotics to transfer profits to the militant outfits or their patrons.[58] These are congenial for spreading terrorism which needs to be addressed.

To resolve issues conducive to spreading terrorism, the government has taken various measures. For instance, in 2010, Bangladesh government formulated a "National Education Policy" that has effectively curbed militancy. The government also made an effort to include anti-radicalism contents in textbooks. Besides, the Ministry of Education has been organizing various awareness programmes in educational institutions on different occasions. To strengthen the campaign against radicalism and violent extremism, the government is integrating NGOs, civil society and media.[59]

5.2 *Pillar II: Measures to Prevent and Combat Terrorism*

Bangladesh unambiguously supports the UN in implementing resolutions regarding counter-terrorism. In 2012, the National Parliament of Bangladesh passed the "Anti-Terrorism Act 2012". Moreover, in 2009 the government enacted the "Money Laundering Prevention Act 2009". In 2012, the act was updated and amended to make the treaty more effective in preventing suspicious money transactions and thus stopping financing for terrorist purposes. On one hand, hard power approach primarily dominates counter-terrorism efforts of the country. On the other hand, counter-radicalization approach is still at the evolving stage. Various terrorist groups' misinterpreted stories need to be replaced by better storytelling initiatives that do not attract people. There is no singular approach to the deradicalization process.[60] The life story of a radicalized individual and his/her sense of victimization can play a positive role in this process. Some scholars acknowledge that it is important to deal with a radicalized person's negative experience and simultaneously focus on particular life-changing incidents from adulteration to purification scripts.[61] They also emphasize on narrating better stories to the young age group, which do not promote radicalism.[62] When any person radicalizes into extremist ideology, then the main obligatory task of an

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[58] Ibid.
[59] "Bangladesh: Success in Counter-Terrorism", *The Centre for Research and Information (CRI)*, 29 May 2014.
[60] Riyad Hosain, Rahimullah, Stephen Larmar and Mohamad Aballa, "Understanding Violent Radicalization Amongst Muslims: A Review of the Literature", *Journal of Psychology and Behavioral Science*, Vol. 1, No. 1, December 2013, pp. 19-35.
[61] Pauline G. M. Aarten, Eva Mulder and Antony Pemberton, "The Narrative of Victimization and Deradicalization: An Expert View", *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 41, No. 7, 2018, pp. 557-572.
[62] Taha Husain, op. cit.

effective counter-terrorism strategy should focus on understanding the nature and core ideology of that terrorist group.

5.3   *Pillar III: Measures to Build State's Capacity to Prevent and Combat Terrorism and to Strengthen the Role of the United Nations System in this World*

Bangladesh is a state party to most UN instruments of anti-terrorism. It is an important actor at UN peacekeeping missions. A state's capacity to counter terrorism largely depends on proper functioning of the country's strategy.[63] Although Bangladesh Police has become much equipped and sophisticated with formation of new units like the Anti-Terrorism Unit (ATU) and Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC) unit, more training (especially cyber knowledge) is required for members of these units to face challenges of the coming days.[64] The ATU has mandates like conducting operations, investigations as well as inquiry of cases against the person involved in terrorism, extremism, terrorist financing and terrorist acts, playing an influential role in preventing terrorist activities by taking initiatives like deradicalization and counter-radicalization, taking necessary steps to formulate and implement plans regarding CVE and PVE.[65] On the other hand, the CTTC usually deals with terrorism, extremism, cyber patrolling and cybercrime, narcotics, explosives, illegal arms and ammunitions, and cross-border crimes.[66]

5.4   *Pillar IV: Measures to Ensure Respect for Human Rights for all and the Rule of Law as the Basis of Fight against Terrorism*

Bangladesh is a party to almost all human rights instruments of the UN. It is the testimony of the country's commitment to the protection and promotion of human rights. Since the inception of the Human Rights Council in 2006, Bangladesh has engaged in constructive dialogue with the international community in human rights issues. However, like human rights protection, counter-terrorism is not discussed much in the country, which is one of the important pillars of the UNGCTS. In this regard, the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) urges member states to formulate their security policies, strategies and measures according to human rights and rule of law while countering terrorism.[67] One of the biggest

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[63] Author's Interview with CTTC official, op. cit.
[64] Ibid.
[65] Anti-Terrorism Unit of Bangladesh Police, available at https://atu.police.gov.bd/our-activities/, accessed on 09 June 2021.
[66] Dhaka Metropolitan Police, available at https://dmp.gov.bd/counter-terrorism/, accessed on 09 June 2021.
[67] Available at https://www.ohchr.org/en/issues/ruleoflaw/pages/terrorism.aspx, accessed on 28 November 2020.

challenges for Bangladesh is to maintain an effective rule of law-based criminal justice system.[68] This can be resolved by following the UNGCTS.

As mentioned earlier, there is no policy-related challenge in implementing the UNGCTS in Bangladesh. At the Plenary on "Measures to Eliminate International Terrorism" during the 67th UNGA, Permanent Representative of Bangladesh to the UN and current Foreign Minister Dr. A K Abdul Momen noted, "Bangladesh fully supports the strategy; in fact, Bangladesh was the facilitator of the resolution regarding review of this strategy in 2010. Bangladesh always calls for the strategy's transparent and comprehensive implementation. We are also in the process of drafting the country's first National Counter Terrorism Strategy in line with the Global Strategy."[69] Thus, the UNGCTS can play a complementary role in formulating the national counter-terrorism strategy of Bangladesh. In this regard, the four pillars of the UNGCTS and establishment of the Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force (CTITF) to facilitate implementation of the strategy can play a significant role.

The strategy can offer Bangladesh a long-term agenda and a holistic approach to address challenges of terrorism. The strategy may strengthen state capacities towards combating terrorist attacks and enhance social capacities to build a community resilient against terrorism or violent extremism. Bangladesh recognizes that terrorism and terrorist activities are a global phenomenon and a threat to all nations irrespective of race, religion, gender, geographical location or culture. The government of Bangladesh, over the years, has demonstrated strong commitment and made undeviating efforts in preventing terrorist groups. Hence, the UNGCTS can play complementary role of national counter-terrorism model or strategy. Since it is not a convention or treaty, there is no issue of adopting or ratifying it. However, Bangladesh has been following the principles of UNGCTS since its inception. As the UNGCTS provides a complete guideline for UN member states in terms of counter-terrorism activities, this has been supplemented by the UN Action Plan on PVE in December 2015. The core issues elucidated in the UNGCTS/UN PVE Action Plan are universal, and Bangladesh government can perform its CT/PVE activities by following the core principles.[70]

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[68] Eric Rosand, Alistair Millar, Jason Ipe and Michael Healey, "The UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy and Regional and Subregional Bodies: Strengthening a Critical Partnership", *Center on Global Counterterrorism Cooperation*, October 2008.
[69] Statement by H.E. Dr. A K Abdul Momen Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Bangladesh to the United Nations at the Plenary of the Sixth Committee of the 67th UNGA on "Measures to Eliminate International Terrorism", available at https://bdun.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/2012.10.08-Bangladesh-Statement-67th-GA-6th-Comm-Meas-to-Elim-Intl-Terrorism.doc, accessed on 09 June 2021.
[70] Author's Interview with CTTC official, op. cit.

6.   Conclusion

Although terrorism in Bangladesh mainly began in the early nineties, most terrorist incidents took place in Bangladesh in the post 9/11. To combat terrorism, the government has taken various measures combining hard and soft power approaches. Since the Holey Artisan incident, law enforcing agencies of Bangladesh undertook several counter-terrorism operations, neutralized many terrorist cells and IED making units throughout the country. However, combating terrorism is one of the biggest challenges of the contemporary world as the adversary is not often or easily visible. Therefore, countries, big or small, strong or weak, face challenges in successfully countering terrorism. As terrorists often transcend national borders, states need to combine actions to address the threats of terrorism. Bangladesh is also not immune from this disease. As a densely populated country, it is tough for Bangladesh to detect terrorists before any incident. Hence, the UNGCTS can supplement the country's efforts to combat terrorism. Particularly, the four pillars of the strategy are very effective tools that can help address the challenge of terrorism.

The government of Bangladesh has shown determined and relentless efforts against terrorists in past years. Nevertheless, as terrorists adapt to exploit new tactics and technologies, the challenge will not be eradicated soon. However, the positive aspect is that the government is formulating a counter-terrorism strategy. As the UNGCTS and its four pillars have relevance in Bangladesh's context, it can positively counter terrorism in Bangladesh. Hence, the national counter-terrorism strategy of Bangladesh can take the four pillars of the UNGCTS into consideration. The UNGCTS can help making a strong and effective counter-terrorism strategy in Bangladesh along with the people's empowerment model