‘Military System of Bangladesh and Civil Military Relations’

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Aas-Salaamu-A’laikum and Good Morning.

**Introductory Comments**

It gives me great pleasure to be here at the NDC once again. Our discussion today has two interlinked components, both of which are intrinsically linked to national security, governance and nation building. Firstly I would like to talk about the military system of Bangladesh with particular reference to structure, composition and capabilities. The international role played by the military of Bangladesh and the impact of this on foreign policy will also be examined. I would then like to speak briefly on the theories of civil military relations, followed by a pragmatic analysis of civil military relations around the world, particularly as it relates to democracies. The concept of objective civilian control and specialization of the military is given particular importance in our deliberation today, as I believe that this is important for promoting a balanced system of civil military control.
Military System of Bangladesh

The Bangladesh Military consist of three uniformed military services namely the Army, Navy and Air Force. The role of the Bangladesh Military transcends beyond national security and defense to include law enforcement, disaster management, emergency services and international peacekeeping.

Part 4 of the Constitution of Bangladesh lays out the principles of authority and regulation as it relates to the defense forces. The constitution stipulates that ‘the supreme command of the defence services of Bangladesh shall vest in the President and the exercise thereof shall be regulated by law and such law shall, during the period in which there is a Non-Party Care-taker Government, be administered by the President.’ The Parliament is the regulatory body for the raising and maintaining of the defence services of Bangladesh and of their reserves, the grant of commissions, the appointment of Chief of Staff of the defence services and the discipline and other matters relating to those services and reserves.

The Bangladesh Army is the largest of the three services of the Bangladesh Military. The role of the Bangladesh Army is to defend Bangladesh against external aggressors and support national development during peacetime. At present there are almost 200,000 active personnel. The Army also plays a significant role in the preservation of internal security. Army officers hold key posts in BGB, RAB, DGFI and various security organizations. Officers from the Bangladesh Army also hold civilian posts in

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1 Bangladesh Army Overview
educational institutions and other organizations intrinsic to the welfare of the nation.

The Bangladesh Navy was established in April 7, 1972 to maintain sovereignty over the nation's territorial waters, to safeguard Bangladesh's economic interest and exercise maritime control within the exclusive economic zone and the continental shelf, and to protect Bangladeshi shipping lines and its merchant fleet. At present the Navy is composed of approximately 24,000 personnel and a mix of both aged and modern warships. In addition to its primary objective of upholding national maritime sovereignty, the Bangladesh Navy is also responsible for performing coast guard duties in support of the Bangladesh Coast Guard (BCG), search and rescue operations, conducting cyclone warning for naval ships and undertaking oceanographic survey.²

The Bangladesh Air Force consists of approximately 17,000 personnel. The key roles of the Bangladesh Air Force include defending Bangladesh's airspace and the Bangladesh military forces’ areas of operation, carry out air transport operations, provide air intelligence, perform air search-and-rescue missions and to assist civil aviation authorities in command, control and services, as required.

² Bangladesh Navy Overview
Overall the Bangladesh Military not only preserves the sovereignty of the country but forms an integral component of nation building, provides rewarding careers to young men and women and serves as a dependable force in times of national crises. In addition to its contribution within the country, the Bangladesh military has achieved recognition and gratitude for its contribution to the U.N peacekeeping forces. According to the latest press release by the UN, at present 99,382 peacekeepers of 115 countries are deployed across the world. Of them, 10,589 or about 11 per cent of the world’s peacekeepers are from Bangladesh. Thus the Bangladesh Military has heightened the image of the country abroad and displayed professionalism and integrity in foreign countries under adverse circumstances. The achievements of the military have provided key Foreign Policy opportunities for Bangladesh to establish her image as a strong democratic nation overseeing a professional military.

Theories and Concepts of Civil Military Relations

Civil-military relations generally refer to the interactions between armed forces as institutions and the society they belong to. In terms of general definition, the democratic civil-military relations stand for the efficient management of security, based on the principles of democracy as well as of the governmental agencies associated with the above mentioned field. Developed states, with a few exceptions, have been able to maintain democratic civil-military relations, a system where civilian elites have the power of final decision making. However many developing countries have failed to maintain civilian supremacy for longer periods. In these states, the
military constitutes the most obvious power base. It is a force to reckon with more at home than abroad and is used widely by civilian and military elites to strengthen their position. Scholars and academicians all over the world have provided many theories which suggest the different ways by which democratic civil-military relations have been maintained in developed states and can also be applied in third world states for bringing civilian supremacy. Classical liberal thinkers like Huntington, Finer & Janowitz and modern democratic thinkers like Feaver & Schiff are the most prominent ones.

President Clinton pointed out in at a speech at Georgetown University in 1991, that countries with democratic governments are more likely to be reliable partners in trade and diplomacy and less likely to be a threat to peace than those with other forms of government. Samuel Huntington, the famous classical liberal thinker, also pointed out during the same time as Clinton gave his speech that, on the basis of past experience, an overwhelmingly democratic world is likely to be a world relatively free of international violence. He argued that proper democratic practice for a country relies largely on the people and their political and military leaders.

Huntington’s Liberal Approach: Civilian Control through professionalism

Samuel Huntington attempted to find a balance in civil-military relations through his theory of civilian control through professionalism. He provided his model of ‘Objective Civilian Control’ in which Civilian control is maintained through entrusting ‘professionalism’ in military corps. Civilians are entitled to dictate military security policy, but would leave the
military elites free to determine what military operations are required to secure the policy objectives. The essence of objective civilian control is the recognition of autonomous military professionalism and independent military sphere.

Huntington argued that a high degree of civilian control could only be achieved in the modern state by a high degree of differentiation of military institutions from other social institutions and the creation of a thoroughly professional officer corps. A professional officer corps, he argued, was jealous of its own limited sphere of competence but recognized its incompetence in matters that lay outside the professional military sphere and hence was willing to accept its role as a subordinate instrument of the state. The less professionalized the officer corps, on the other hand, the less differentiation there was between military and political roles and therefore the less justification for military obedience to political authority. Many scholars have disputed this classical liberal theory that professionalism ensures the insulation of military from politics.

Samuel E. Finer, another well-known political scientist, believed that professionalism could, in fact, thrust the military into collision with civilian authorities, as military elites may see themselves as the servants of the state rather than of the government and also that armed forces may fall prey to ‘military syndicalism,’ the idea that as specialists only they have the qualification to make decisions about defense. However, Huntington believed that professionalism entailed the reorientation of the armed forces toward their rightful (external) missions, the elimination of overstaffing and
non-military responsibilities and the conferring on the armed forces the status and the respect they deserved.

**Civil Military Relations in various Nations**

The past three decades have seen a global trend of democratic transition going hand in hand with the decline of military regimes and open military intervention. In 1979, fourteen military regimes held power in sub-Saharan Africa, nine in Latin America, five in the Arab states and North Africa, three in Southeast Asia, two in South Asia, and one in East Asia. Since then, democracy replaced all of the military or “quasi-civilian” regimes in Latin America. In the Middle and Near East, military rule has almost universally transformed into civilian strongman rule except in recent months, where we have witnessed revolutions in several countries in the region, from Tunisia to Bahrain. In Asia, Bangladesh, Indonesia, South Korea, Thailand and Pakistan have moved from military domination to democracy or mixed patterns of civilian-military authority. To date, Myanmar is still the only country in Asia where the military openly rules by force.

In spite of this development, asserting civilian control of the armed forces remains high on the political agenda in many emerging democracies. In most of the nations of South and Southeast Asia, the military used to be a key player, ruling through authoritarian regimes. Even today, after two decades of democratic development in East Asia, civilian control is still not an uncontested norm in the region. The only exception is Myanmar, where soldiers have controlled politics since 1962, though an opportunity for democratization did appear to open briefly in 1990, which ended in failure.
These democratic changes have inspired an entirely new generation of comparative analyses of democratic change in the region. In recent years, various comparative studies have been published which deal with institutions of democratic governance, their internal processes, and their impact on the consolidation of new democracies in the region. Additionally, there are several works which analyze relevant political decision-making institutions and organizations.

Since the early 70s, democratization has witnessed the replacement of authoritarian regimes by democratically elected governments at a phenomenal rate, including in Asia. In South Asia, for example, military rulers had to agree to share their power with democratically elected civilians in Pakistan in 1987-88, and in Bangladesh in 1990-1. Southeast Asia’s recent wave of democratization began with the demise of the personal dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos in the Philippines in 1986. Thailand (1988, 1992), Cambodia (1993), Indonesia (1999) and East Timor (2002) followed in successive order.

Despite these regional democratic trends, Thailand, the Philippines, Indonesia, Pakistan and Bangladesh continue to be beset by unstable parliamentary institutions, weak rule of law, inchoate systems of political representation, chronic corruption, bureaucratic inefficiency, and a lack of social justice. Meanwhile, the wave of democratization and people-power that swept through Southeast and South Asia in the 1980s and 1990s has had little effect on the military government of Myanmar. In addition, Cambodia’s nascent democracy eroded into a new kind of electoral
authoritarianism under the leadership of Prime Minister Hun Sen in the late 1990s. Furthermore, East Timor, Asia’s youngest nation and one of the United Nations’ prestigious showcases of post-conflict state building and democratization, continues to stand in a condition of severe state fragility. Even though a major part of democratization efforts has involved removing militaries from the political arena and subordinating them under civilian control, such efforts have encountered a multiplicity of obstacles in most countries. Apart from Myanmar which today offers a case of failed transition to democracy in the face of massive military control over political space, in the emerging democracies of Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, Bangladesh, and especially Pakistan, the military has shown itself more or less resilient in guarding its prerogatives in the post-authoritarian era. This seriously impedes the democratically elected authorities’ elective power to govern in these countries.

Civil-Military Relations in Bangladesh

Civil-military relations in post colonial states are largely determined by the circumstances of their inception. It is an undeniable fact that the 1971 War of Liberation and the subsequent political and social ramifications profoundly influenced the trajectory of civil-military relations of Bangladesh. Generally, the War of Independence removed the colonial feature of physical and social distance between the civilian and military. However, subsequent political interventions, internal fractions and disparate ideologies have strained civil-military relations in Bangladesh. Despite this, taking into account the exogenous and endogenous factors effecting civil-

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military relations, the military was and will continue to be, an important denominator in politics as well as nation building. Past military regimes should not undermine the fact that Bangladesh, as a nation, is inherently democratic. The democratic aspirations of people, the activities of NGOs, neighboring states, donor countries and contemporary economic and social factors all determine the viability of civil-military relations in Bangladesh.⁵

Non-intervention of politics in the military, the organization of dialogues between civil and military stakeholders and autonomy of the military in undertaking its basic roles concerning national interest, as well as the subjugation of military to lawful political control would all contribute in enhancing a harmonious and beneficial civil-military relationship.

**Civil-Military Relations in Pakistan**

In our region, one can cite Pakistan as the classic example of a praetorian state, in which the Army perceived itself as the sole guardian of the nation’s sovereignty and moral integrity, as well as, the chief initiator of the national agenda and the main arbiter of conflict between social and political forces.⁶ The ubiquity of the military’s role in all aspects of national governance has meant that Pakistan, until today has never experienced a period of civilian supremacy. Decades of military rule has accentuated the military’s dominance in foreign policy, national defense and internal security. Recently Pakistan is perceived to have moved to a higher degree of civilian control after alternating periods of direct and non-direct military rule. The traditional alliance between the military and the Ministries of

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Defense and Foreign Affairs are deteriorating due to efficiency issues and differences of interest. It is undeniable that the democratic system in Pakistan needs to be further strengthened and the role of civil society in governance needs to be enhanced in order to bring balance and cohesion to civil-military relations in Pakistan.

**What Society Expects of the Military**

In this discussion we are having, it would be pertinent to speak a bit about society’s expectation from the military. What do civilian authorities and the people more generally expect of the military as part of this compact?

**Operational Competence**

Above all else, they expect operational competence--the ability of the military to fulfill its mission, to get the job done, to accomplish all tasks assigned, even those that are only implied.

**Sound Advice**

A second thing civilians expect of the military is sound advice -- rendering the best possible professional judgment to the elected and appointed civilian authorities who are supposed to be accountable for the country's security.

**Political Neutrality**

Third, civilians also expect the military to be politically neutral--to remain above the unseemly expediency, favoritism, and self-interested deal making of low, partisan politics.
Social Responsibility

Finally, civilians expect the military to be socially responsible -- to be an institution that not only gets the job done operationally, but that does so in a manner that contributes to, or at least doesn't undermine, the values and institutions of civil society. This imperative assumes heightened, even overriding, importance when the military is employed in response to domestic emergencies such as terrorism or drug trafficking.

In the context of unconventional, asymmetric warfare and the contemporary auxiliary of nation-building, civil-military relations must be reassessed and contentious efforts must be undertaken to close the gap between civil and military constituents of statecraft. A cohesive civil-military relationship is not only a prerequisite for conducting international security initiatives such as humanitarian interventions but also for addressing national security concerns of terrorism, insurgency and politically motivated violence. In order to ensure the safety and security of a nation, stakeholders from military and civil society must engage in robust discussions aimed at minimizing communication and operational gaps and promulgate concerns and recommendations. It was with this conviction that The Bangladesh Enterprise Institute, in partnership with the Defense Institute Reform Initiative of the U.S Department of Defense undertook a year-long exercise titled ‘Towards Developing a Counter-Terrorism Strategy for Bangladesh’, the essential goal of which was to enhance the effectiveness of civil-military relations. The four workshops spanning multiple days, facilitated a cohesive, interactive platform for civilian and military stakeholders to engage in
collaborative, interactive deliberations featured by presentations, break-out
groups and discussion sessions. This collaborative scheme was a resounding
success in bringing together academicians, representatives of government
ministries, law enforcement, and national defense and incorporating their
recommendations in the drafting of a national counter-terrorism strategy for
Bangladesh, which will be submitted to the government. Thus a civil-
military relation is an essential determinant of a country’s security and
stability at home and the effectiveness of its military operations abroad. In a
dynamic, interlinked security environment comprising of traditional and
non-traditional security constituents, asymmetric warfare and the
contemporary auxiliaries of terrorism and nation-building, cohesive civil-
military relations are essential in ensuring peace and stability. Further
initiatives must be undertaken to enhance civil-military collaborations to
prepare Bangladesh for the complex security challenges within the
interconnected geopolitical matrix of the 21st century.

I would like to thank the National Defense College for organizing this
introspective session and also express my gratitude to the members of the
audience for your kind attention.