

THE CHINA-BANGLADESH RELATION AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR U.S. FOREIGN POLICY

Colonel Jeffrey P. Gottlieb, ndc

Introduction

The nature of the China-Bangladesh relation poses both challenges and opportunities for the United States. The problem is to determine the nature of the bilateral relation, how it serves the interests of both nations, and the implications for the foreign policy of the United States. The relation would be relatively straightforward were it not for three regional and international factors. First, Bangladesh's geo-economic and geopolitical position at the head of the Bay of Bengal affects the interests of not only her neighbors but of all her trading partners and even global powers. Second, Bangladesh is encircled by India and must account for India in all her foreign relations. Third, the rise of China relative to the United States means that relations of all states with China are perforce of interest to the United States.

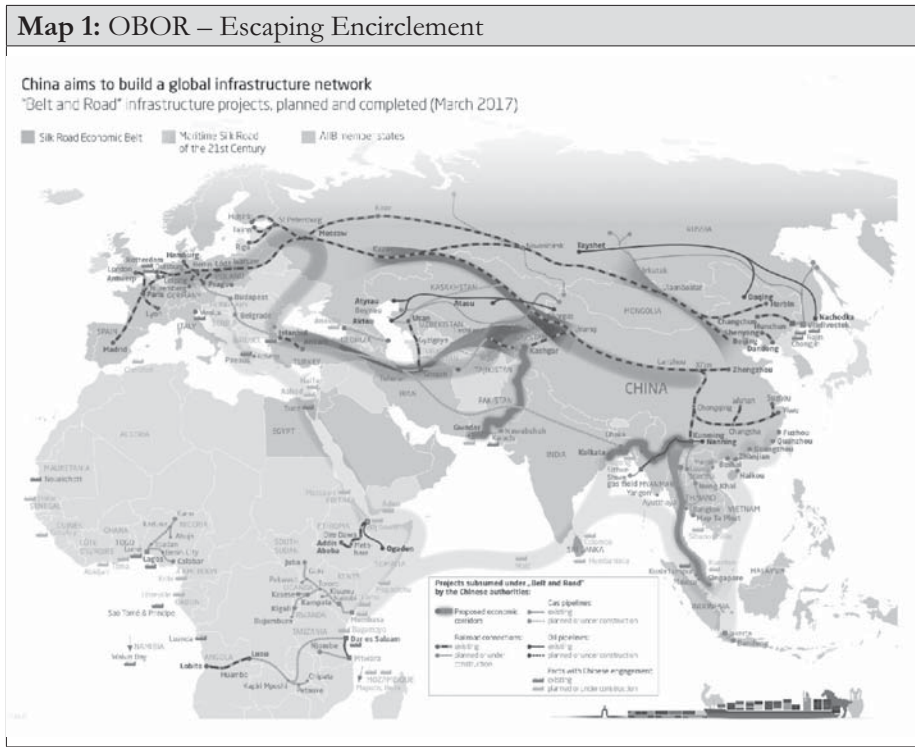
The Geostrategic Setting

Unlike the United States or the European Union - which cannot be encircled - China, Bangladesh and India all face encirclement by potential adversaries and their foreign relations must account for this. All are developing nations whose major trade routes are seaborne making the economic foundation of their national power and their independence of action particularly vulnerable to such encirclement.

China finds herself in a difficult geostrategic position. Hemmed in to the north by the Altai Mountains, Mongolia and Russian Siberia; to the east is the Tien Shan range and desert; to the south are the Himalayas, the mountains of Yunnan and Guangxi, and the forests of Myanmar, Laos and Vietnam. The difficulty of overland communications through such terrain means only 9.5% of Chinese exports go overland through her neighbors the rest does by sea.¹ Chinese energy imports,

1. Observatory of Economic Complexity, "Bangladesh" available at <http://atlas.media.mit.edu/en/profile/country/bgd/>, accessed 9 July 2017.

especially oil, depend on the sea. Approximately 90% of her oil imports come by sea, with 82% passing through the Strait of Malacca.² Thus, the land routes of the One Belt and One Road Initiative (OBOR) are a strategic economic necessity, a way to avoid encirclement by reducing China’s vulnerability to blockade. As long as China remains reliant on the sea for trade she must ensure good relations with the states on her borders, with the members of ASEAN and with the allies of the United States that physically dominate the approaches to the East and South China Seas – South Korea, Japan and the Philippines (see Map 1 below).



India has Bangladesh encircled by land and sea. Of greater potential danger than its encirclement by land and sea, India controls Bangladesh’s two main sources of river water, the Ganges and Brahmaputra and China controls the headwaters of the Brahmaputra. This vulnerability makes good relations with India and China imperative for Bangladesh. Bangladesh is not, however, completely helpless before her much larger neighbor. Bangladesh’s relations with China are a counter to

2. Business Insider, “This Pentagon map shows what’s really driving China’s military and diplomatic strategy?” available at <http://www.businessinsider.com/this-map-shows-chinas-global-energy-ties-2015-5>, accessed 15 September 2017.

overbearing behavior by India; India must have access to routes through Bangladesh to improve connectivity and pursue the “Act East” policy; Bangladesh poses a remote but potential military threat to the Siliguri Corridor; and Bangladesh can stir up trouble in the Seven Sisters as some claim she has in the past.

India is better placed geographically than Bangladesh but worse placed geopolitically. To the west lie her enemy Pakistan, to the north the Himalayas and her rival China, and to the east is China’s friend Myanmar. Poorer than China, India must be a land power to deter China and Pakistan and a sea power to control of the Indian Ocean. India does not have the option of developing connectivity with a strategic hinterland of neighboring states, hence the necessity for the “Act East” policy, a logical way for India to build relations with countries that can help her keep China away from the Indian Ocean.

In sum, China, Bangladesh and India all face potential encirclement. China is in the stronger position against her Indian rival. India, while she cannot hope to counter-encircle China, cannot herself be encircled so long as she controls the Indian Ocean. Because Bangladesh poses no threat to the security of India or China, she can benefit from Indian and Chinese security concerns vis-à-vis each other. Hans Morgenthau’s observation that “the kind of interest determining political action in a particular period of history depends on the political and cultural context”³ is apt with respect to the three powers. The political and cultural context of Sino-Indian relations, one of rivalry and competition, gives Bangladesh an opportunity to exploit the “pattern of competition” and ensure that the Sino-Indian rivalry functions “to preserve the independence” of the weaker power⁴, Bangladesh.

China - Interests, Policies and Strategies

“In their endeavor to realize the Chinese Dream of great national rejuvenation, the Chinese people aspire to join hands with the rest of the world to maintain peace, pursue development and share prosperity.”⁵

China announced its core interests in a document from 2011, China’s Peaceful Development. They are “state sovereignty, national security, territorial integrity

3. Hans Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, Boston: McGraw-Hill, 1993, p. 11.

4. *Ibid.*, pp. 190-192.

5. State Council Information Office of the PRC, “China’s Military Strategy” available at <http://eng.mod.gov.cn/Database/WhitePapers/2014.htm>, accessed 2 July 2017.

and national reunification, China's political system established by the Constitution and overall social stability, and the basic safeguards for ensuring sustainable economic and social development."⁶ These interests fall into three areas – the defense of the nation, the defense of the system, and the development of the nation in support of both. They fit the realist conceptions of “interest defined in terms of power” and the “elements of national power” used to pursue them with national power resting on the material means provided by the economy and the decisive factors of “the quality of society and the government,”⁷ in Chinese terms, the political system and social stability.

That social stability is defined as a core Chinese interest is not surprising. Many analysts, including Chinese analysts, have noted the deep domestic political roots of China's foreign policy. As Jian Zhang of Peking University noted, “In general, beyond issues such as food safety, environment pollution and rampant corruption that are hurting the welfare of nearly everyone, all major social classes, poor or rich, have their specific reasons to feel disgruntled.”⁸ Zhang thought the aggressive aspects of China's foreign policy can be seen as attempting to distract from domestic social and political pains. “Foreign policy ‘pills’ as a means of addressing domestic pains have been a popular choice for politicians throughout the ages.”⁹

The role China seeks to play in the world is ambiguous. In a recent speech, the Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi claimed that China does not seek to lead the world because ...

A globalized world, where countries are more closely inter-connected than ever before, needs not a single-handed hero but partners of cooperation who stick together in times of difficulty. This is why China has put forward the idea of building partnerships as the new direction for state-to-state relations, a proposal welcomed by most countries.¹⁰

Xi Jinping echoed this formulation during his speech at the CPC National Congress, emphasizing the theme that “China will never seek hegemony or

6. State Council of the PRC, “China's Peaceful Development” available at http://english.gov.cn/archive/white_paper/2014/09/09/content_281474986284646.htm, accessed online 7 July 2017.

7. Morgenthau, *op. cit.*, pp. 152-154.

8. Jian Zhang, “The domestic sources of China's more assertive foreign policy”, *International Politics*, Vol. 51, No. 3, 2014, p. 393.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 394.

10. Wang Yi, “Work Together to Build Partnerships and Pursue Peace and Development” available at http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/zyjh_665391/t1448155.shtml, accessed 2 July 2017.

engage in expansion.”¹¹ China is unready, or perhaps unwilling, to take a more active role, and would prefer to focus on economic development in order to mitigate “domestic pains” and avoid the expense of world leadership.

When considering Chinese policy toward Bangladesh, the only core interests concerned are economic development and national security. Bangladesh can directly contribute to China’s economic development through trade and can indirectly contribute to China’s national security but has no realistic role to play in helping China with other interests. From the Chinese point of view, economic development indirectly affects social development and further social stability but this is not something that is exclusive to Bangladesh, rather it applies to all of China’s trading partners.

In terms of economic development, the Chinese see Bangladesh as a key part of their strategy. The Bangladesh, China, India and Myanmar Economic Corridor (BCIM-EC) is a key part of OBOR, an effort to develop South Asian connectivity from Kunming to Kolkata. As Ding and Li describe it ...

On the one hand, it will help China get access to the required resources (rather than destinations for its exports); on the other hand, it will help China find new markets where it can transfer its excess infrastructure production - because the domestic market for this is shrinking - and to exchange China’s portfolio of US treasury bills into more productive investments in the new markets.¹²

Avia Nahreen sees China’s view of Bangladesh driven by “Bangladesh’s strategically important geographic location, physical and political proximity to India [and the Indian Ocean], availability of cheap labour, and proximity to the Bay of Bengal” adding in addition that China will seek to relocate sunset industries to Bangladesh.¹³ Thus, Bangladesh can become a supplier of inexpensive consumer goods to China as China moves up the value chain.

After the October, 2016 summit between China’s President and Bangladesh’s Prime Minister, the joint statement detailed areas of economic cooperation. China and Bangladesh agreed to cooperate on the BCIM-EC and in “industrial

-
11. Xinhua, “Full text: Vision for Maritime Cooperation under the Belt and Road Initiative” available at http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-10/18/c_136688994.htm, accessed 20 October 2017.
 12. Yibing Ding and Xiao Li, “The Past and Future of China’s Role in the East Asian Economy: A Trade Perspective”, *Canadian Public Policy*, Vol. 43, No. 2, 2017, p. 54.
 13. Avia Nahreen, “The growing strategic importance of Bangladesh to China” available at <http://www.thedailystar.net/op-ed/the-growing-strategic-importance-bangladesh-china-1393957>, accessed 2 July 2017.

capacity building, power and energy, information and communication technology, investment, maritime cooperation, disaster management and cultural and people-to-people contacts.”¹⁴ Agreements on cultural and people-to-people contacts show China’s use of the informational instrument of national power.

China has a requirement to gain alternate access to the Indian Ocean for both economic and security reasons. One of the motivations behind OBOR, in its China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and BCIM-EC aspects, is to bypass the Malacca Strait overland. There is also a potential threat of China using its influence in and access to the Indian Ocean to encircle India and counter to any encirclement of China by India, Japan, South Korea and others. China’s security relations with Bangladesh introduce a very small measure of uncertainty on India’s western flank even while the threat from Bangladesh to India is more apparent than real. Chakravarty notes that with China providing “more than 80 per cent of the arms inventory of the Bangladesh defence forces” and “droves of Bangladeshi defence personnel travelling to China for training” there is a “consequent exposure to Chinese influence and inducements.”¹⁵ China may hope that this influence will develop into something more substantial, like its relationship with Pakistan, but there is scant evidence of that at this time.

There is however, evidence that China would at least like Bangladesh’s tacit support in disputes China has with third parties. Analyzing China’s recent White Paper on “China’s Policies on Asia-Pacific Security Cooperation,” Singh highlights the unambiguous sentence, “Small and medium sized countries need not and should not take sides among big countries.”¹⁶ With the “big countries” elsewhere defined as China, the United States, Russia, India, and Japan, this implies that China, as a condition of its economic relationship with Bangladesh, expects Bangladesh will not to “take sides.”

In sum, China’s relations with Bangladesh are primarily concerned with the Chinese core interests of sustainable economic development and national security. In order to further these interests, Chinese policy emphasizes developing trade, investment and connectivity with Bangladesh and defense cooperation.

14. Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Joint Statement of The People’s Republic of China and The People’s Republic of Bangladesh on Establishing Strategic Partnership of Cooperation 14 October 2016” available at <http://www.mofa.gov.bd/media/joint-statement-people’s-republic-china-and-people’s-republic-bangladesh-establishing>, accessed 3 May 2017.

15. Pinak Ranjan Chakravarty, “Bangladesh-India Ties: Pragmatic Transformation”, *Indian Foreign Affairs Journal*, Vol. 10, No. 3, 2015, p. 215.

16. Daljit Singh, “China’s White Paper on Security Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific Region and Chinese Grand Strategy”, ISEAS Yusof Ishak Institute, Singapore, 2017.

The primary strategies are financing of joint projects in Bangladesh to develop infrastructure, industrial capacity, energy and power, transportation, information and communication technology, agriculture; the BCIM-EC to enhance regional connectivity; and military equipment sales and training.

Bangladesh - Interests, Policies and Strategies

“Friendship to all and malice towards none.” (Bangabandhu)

“In the year 2041, Bangladesh will become a peaceful, prosperous and developed place after crossing the status of a middle-income country.” (Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina)

According to the Foreign Minister, the Prime Minister wants Bangladesh “[t]o be recognized as a regionally and globally influential Middle Income Country, with a democratic, secular and inclusive identity, contributing to global peace, progress and prosperity” by 2041.¹⁷ This will enable Bangladesh to pursue its national interests of “[p]reservation of sovereignty and territorial integrity, economic security, energy security, environmental preservation and internal peace and cohesion.”¹⁸

Bangladesh has very serious ambitions to meet the Sustainable Development goals and to become a high-income country as part of Vision 2041. To do so, it will need help. As Zara Zain Hussain bluntly wrote it, “Bangladesh needs to collaborate with wealthier and more technologically advanced neighbors to sustain growth in the coming years.”¹⁹ Sarwar Jahan Chowdhury sees a need for very close collaboration with the Chinese.

China has a stable vision for Asia and we perfectly fit into it. We shall surely not discard India or the US, neither should we get tied in their disputes.²⁰ (Chowdhury 2016)

17. Address to National Defence Course 2017 by A H Mahmood Ali, Foreign Minister, Bangladesh on “Bangladesh Foreign Policy” on 18 June 2017, National Defence College, Dhaka.

18. Urme Hossain, “Foreign Policy” available at http://en.banglapedia.org/index.php?title=Foreign_Policy, accessed 7 July 2017.

19. Zaara Zain Hussain, “The ‘BCIM Regional Cooperation.’ An Emerging Multilateral Framework in Asia”, *Geopolitics, History, and International Relations*, Vol. 7, No. 2, 2015, p. 179.

20. Sarwar Jahan Chowdhury, “The geo-politics of Bangladesh-China relations” available at <http://opinion.bdnews24.com/2016/10/13/the-geo-politics-of-bangladesh-china-relations/>, accessed 3 April 2017.

This argument represents a significant stream in Bangladeshi strategic thought but not one leading to confrontation with India. It helps “Bangladesh to exploit its strategically important location on the Bay of Bengal to extract concessions and economic assistance from India, China and Japan.”²¹

As a variation on the “pill” metaphor, Bangladesh’s economic policies can be seen as the “pill” to ease foreign policy pains. With Europe and the United States the buyers of over three quarters of Bangladesh’s exports, Ayesha Kabir argues that “Bangladesh’s major [economic] interests are wrapped up with the Western world.”²² In contrast, China and India are the source of over half of Bangladesh’s imports. This helps explain Chinese and Indian interest in the further economic development of Bangladesh.

The tension between pro-Chinese and pro-Indian opinion flows from popular opinion and domestic political tensions. During an interview, a distinguished expert emphasized two points. First, that Bangladeshi public opinion is “basically anti-Indian, Bengalis see them as a bully who make no concessions to their neighbors.” Second, that “China needs Bangladesh and Bangladesh needs China.”²³ In other words, the interests of Bangladesh and China are congruent and essentially economic.

There is in this a danger for Bangladesh. When the Chinese invest, they have a reputation for employing Chinese workers, for the low quality of what they build, for often building without considering the long-term economic prospects for success, and for environmental despoliation as Carrie Gracie extensively documented in a recent article for the British Broadcasting Corporation.²⁴ Bloomberg News, in a generally favorable assessment of OBOR, reported on other the failed projects.²⁵ Bangladesh must ensure, in all her dealings with the Chinese that there is actually a win for Bangladesh, not two wins for China.

In short, Bangladesh’s relations with China are primarily concerned with her interest of economic security. Bangladesh is using her geographic position and projects like BCIM-EC to develop her connectivity and various sub-sectors of

21. Economist Intelligence Unit, “Country Report, Bangladesh” available at <http://www.eiu.com/home.aspx>, accessed 13 April 2017.

22. Ayesha Kabir, “Bangladesh and the New Cold War”, *Defence Journal Pakistan*, Vol. 17, No. 9, 2014, p. 11.

23. Interview by the author under Chatham House Rule of Anonymous 4, 2017, National Defence College, Dhaka.

24. Carrie Gracie, “Tales from the New Silk Road” available at http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/resources/itdsh/new_silk_road, accessed 15 July 2017.

25. Bloomberg News, “Chinese Spending Lures Countries to Its Belt and Road Initiative” available at <https://www.bloomberg.com/graphics/2017-china-belt-and-road-initiative/>, accessed 11 September 2017.

the economy. Bangladesh policy emphasizes increasing trade and investment. The primary strategies are securing financing of joint projects to develop infrastructure, industrial capacity, energy and power, transportation, information and communication technology, agriculture, and BCIM-EC to enhance regional connectivity. In its relations with China, Bangladesh primarily employs the diplomatic and economic instruments of national power and exploits its location at the head of the Bay of Bengal and as India's neighbor.

The Influence of India on the Bilateral Relation

“We have no dispute with China and hence Bangladesh-China relations can grow almost unrestricted. However, the reality is Bangladesh is surrounded by India from three sides.”²⁶

No consideration of the China-Bangladesh relation makes complete sense without considering the role of India. Many Bangladeshis see India as a bully characterize India as an overbearing, big brother. This attitude affects both relations between India and Bangladesh and between China and Bangladesh. As a distinguished speaker explained, there is a “domestic requirement not to show subservience to India.”²⁷ Yet, Bangladesh and India must cooperate to achieve their goals of territorial integrity and national security as well as to ensure their security and to achieve goals of regional and international influence.

India is growing, and wants more international influence. As the Economist Intelligence Unit recently noted ...

India's growing economic influence will be reflected in greater assertiveness in its international relations. Within South Asia, it will seek to establish itself as the leading power and build closer economic and political ties (except with Pakistan).²⁸

What this means for Bangladesh is the resolution of old disputes as well as deepening economic ties. It is significant that Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi met with Sheikh Hasina in April 2017; six months after President Xi met with her. India is vying with the China for influence in Bangladesh.

India remains justly worried about the intentions of Pakistan and China. At the National Defence College, a speaker noted that “relations with China are the

26. Chowdhury, op. cit.

27. Interview by the author under Chatham House Rule of Anonymous 4, 2017, National Defence College, Dhaka.

28. Economist Intelligence Unit, “Country Report, India” available at <http://www.eiu.com/home.aspx>, accessed 13 April 2017.

cornerstone of Pakistan's foreign policy" and asserted that "a Russia-China-Pakistan axis is emerging that will bring stability and counter other alignments in the region." He invited Bangladesh to join this axis, claiming "modernization of the Bangladesh Armed Forces will add to regional stability if close relations are developed between Pakistan, China and Bangladesh."²⁹ These declarations will not assuage Indian concerns.

Even with its suspicion of the Chinese, India knows where the future lies. Even sources that, like Chakravarty, are hostile to the Chinese and sometimes dismissive of the Bangladeshis, understand this.³⁰ "Act East" is a sort of BCIM-EC without China and is advantageous to Bangladesh. Even if it takes decades to create real connectivity from Kolkata to Kunming, all of the connectivity improvements built in Bangladesh will be of immediate use and will benefit Bangladesh from the moment they are completed.

It appears that India is beginning to wake up to the fact that Bangladesh can no longer be treated like a little brother.³¹ That this is so is clear from the results of the April 2017 state visit. In the Joint Statement, India committed to billions of dollars in lines of credit, a significant commitment for a country that is still as poor as India. While the details of these commitments are not yet publicly known the mere fact that they have been made indicates that India understands the necessity for development and trade with its smaller neighbor.

The China-Bangladesh Relation in the Regional Context

"When you're the only girl in the village, all of the boys are interested in you."

Bangladesh is one of the most vital countries for China in expanding its sphere of influence in South and Southeast Asia. ... It is now for Bangladesh to gain leverage from China's checkbook diplomacy while maintaining the delicate balance of regional geopolitics.³²

With a steadily growing economy and having just reached the status of a lower-middle-income country, Bangladesh is an attractive partner for trade and investment, not just for its South Asian neighbors but also for China. Map 2 below, shows part of the contest for influence in Bangladesh. China leads in

29. Address to National Defence Course 2017 under Chatham House Rule by Anonymous 2, 2017, National Defence College, Dhaka.

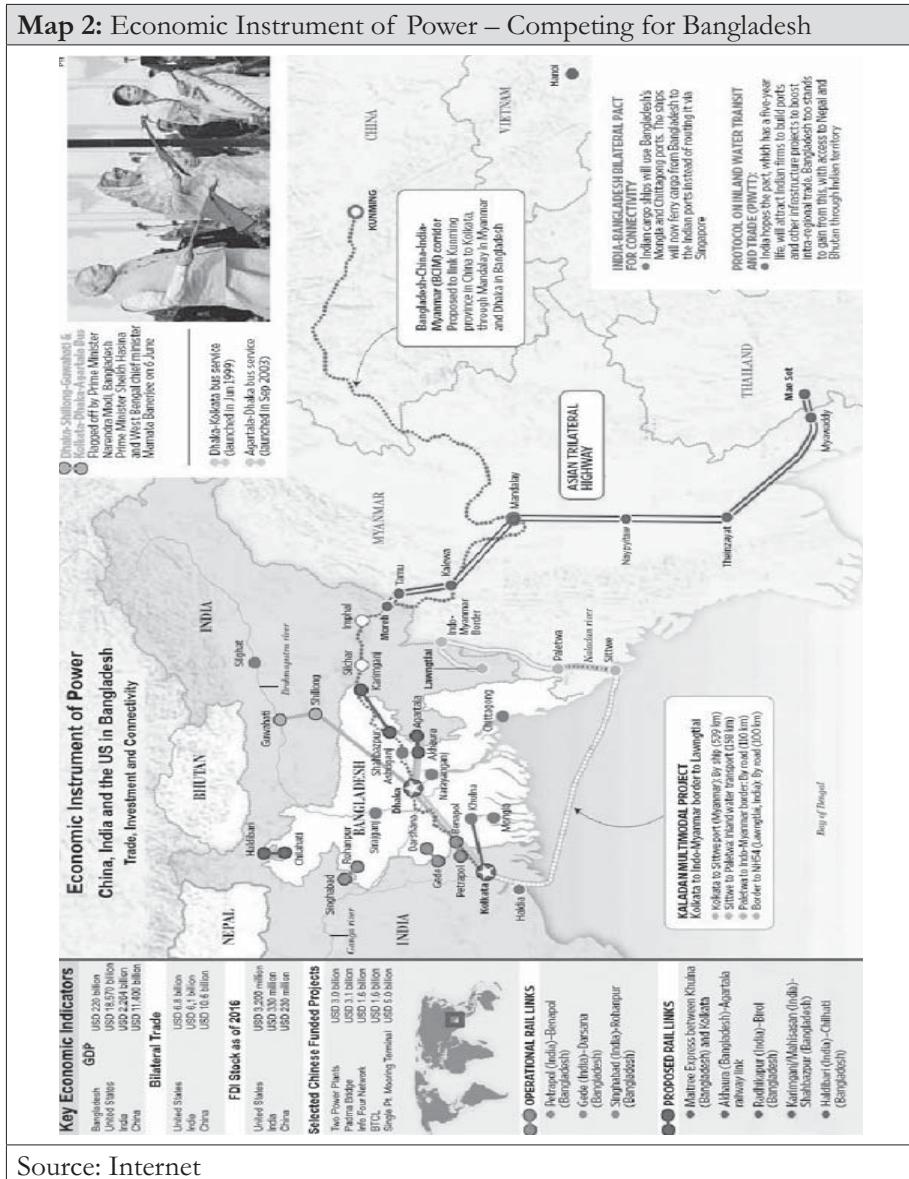
30. Chakravarty, *op. cit.*, p. 212.

31. Interview by the author under Chatham House Rule of Anonymous 4, 2017, National Defence College, Dhaka.

32. Nahreen, *op. cit.*

terms of total bilateral trade with the United States and India close behind. The United States has contributed by far the greatest stock of foreign direct investment. China, however, enjoys an influential advantage in the provision of funding for projects to develop Bangladesh's power supplies, connectivity and information technology.

Map 2: Economic Instrument of Power – Competing for Bangladesh



Source: Internet

China must remain careful as she engages Bangladesh. The effects on her relations with India must be taken into consideration as well as the effects on BCIM-EC and OBOR as a whole. Despite its suspicions, India clearly sees the need for greater connectivity if not for greater integration in other areas. For Bangladesh, the Rohingya crisis, discussed in more detail below, has shown that the head of the Bay of Bengal might not be the only village.

These other interests of China and India explain their reaction to the current crisis. They wish to offend neither Bangladesh nor Myanmar but both have decided that Myanmar has much to offer them and they are willing to trade a little diplomatic tension with Bangladesh to continue their economic engagement with Myanmar. Here we see the two emerging powers pursuing their “interests in terms of power”³³ and Bangladesh in a position evoking Thucydides’ dismissal of morality in international relations, “the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must.”³⁴

It is unlikely that Bangladesh will follow the suggestions of Pakistan and join any emerging Russia-China-Pakistan axis. This is because, despite past difficulties, too much depends on its relations with India, particularly water sharing but also energy supplies and trade. Bangladesh is, however, beginning to seek more opportunities within South Asia despite a moribund SAARC.³⁵ In the regional context, Bangladesh appears as quite aggressive in seeking bilateral agreements with her neighbors, China and other partners all of whom appear interested.

There is only one country at the head of the Bay of Bengal. There is only one country with steady, high growth and a potential demographic dividend. There is only one country critical to the success of both China’s BCIM-EC and India’s drive to increase connectivity to the East. That country is Bangladesh. In the regional context, Bangladesh is the only girl in the village and all the boys will have to pay attention to her.

Bangladesh, China, India and the Rohingya Crisis

For Bangladesh, the Rohingya crisis shows the limits of diplomacy and the primacy of the economic interests. It is clear that Bangladesh does not want war. Assuming Myanmar could be forced to accept repatriation of the refugees, such

33. Morgenthau, op. cit., p. 5.

34. Thucydides as translated by Richard Crawley, “History of the Peloponnesian War” available at <http://classics.mit.edu/Thucydides/pelopwar.html>, accessed 18 September 2017.

35. Dhaka Unb, “FTA with Sri Lanka this yr” available at <http://www.thedailystar.net/frontpage/fta-sri-lanka-yr-1433335>, accessed 15 July 2017.

would not solve the problem. Neither are denunciations from western and Muslim countries likely to force Myanmar to accept the Rohingya. For the time being, and it may be a long time, Bangladesh has little choice but to continue to receive and support the refugees while continuing to mobilize diplomatic, informational and economic support from other states, international organizations and NGOs.

China and India support Myanmar because both states have big infrastructure projects in Myanmar. India's Kaladan project is designed to provide a links to the northeast through Sittwe port. China's Kyaukphyu port is the start of a pipeline and railroad link to Yunnan.³⁶ For China, the reason to support Myanmar is the benefits of the Kyaukphyu project that will provide China with a second Malacca Strait bypass to complement Gwadar in Pakistan. India, like China, sees Myanmar in geostrategic terms as the linchpin of "Act East" and knows that her influence in Naypyidaw is less than China's. If China bests her in Myanmar and forges a relationship as close as the Sino-Pakistani relationship, India will be completely encircled on land.

Implications for United States Foreign Policy

"Bangladesh is a country of great strategic importance to the United States and America has a very strong interest in a peaceful, secure, prosperous, healthy and democratic Bangladesh."³⁷

It may seem a gross exaggeration to assert that China, India and the United states are actively contending for influence in Bangladesh but it is nevertheless true that each in its own way is pursuing its national interest. How does the United States see its relations with Bangladesh? What is America trying to accomplish?

The United States objective is a peaceful, stable, secure and democratic Bangladesh. In the security context of counter-terrorism, Bangladesh stands out as a moderate, secular, tolerant, and pluralistic rebuke to the nihilism of violent extremism. Bangladesh is a critical partner in the fight against violent extremism and the promotion of regional peace and stability.

36. South China Morning Post, "Why Do China, India Back Myanmar over the Rohingya Crisis?" available at <http://www.scmp.com/week-asia/geopolitics/article/2115839/why-do-china-india-back-myanmar-over-rohingya-crisis>, accessed 18 October 2017.

37. Address to National Defence Course 2017 by Marcia Bernicat, U.S. Ambassador to Bangladesh, on "United States Policy in Bangladesh - Partners in Security and Development" on 25 June 2017, National Defence College, Dhaka.

Bangladesh is important to United States interests not just in terms of Bangladesh's security but also regionally and globally. Bangladesh fosters stability in the region and as one of the largest contributors of forces to international peacekeeping operations Bangladesh promotes global peace. In the economic context, Bangladesh's economic development benefits both Bangladesh and America. Bangladesh's huge ready-made garments sector, the second largest in the world, is firmly established in the American market, and American companies increasingly see Bangladesh as a future market and investment opportunity.

The United States has an interest in the social and political development that underpins Bangladesh's security. Pluralistic, democratic systems enable the healthy release of political tension leading to greater stability. Stability counters violent extremism and boosts economic development by creating a favorable business climate that helps attract foreign investment.

In this light, how does the United States view China-Bangladesh relations and what are the implications of this growing relationship for America's foreign policy? In extensive remarks at the National Defence, a senior defense official plainly indicated that America's rebalance to the Pacific had ignored the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean due to its focus on China. He also said that, for the United States, the focus in South Asia was India.³⁸ From these comments, it is obvious that the United States is not focused on China-Bangladesh relations. However, despite the focus of the United States on counter-terrorism and Bangladesh's economic, social and political development there are some implications for American foreign policy.

The United States wants Bangladesh to succeed economically. A fruitful Bangladesh-China relation can only help. Both the BBC and Bloomberg News have extensively reported on the deficiencies of some Chinese infrastructure projects. To prevent the negative features of Chinese economic engagement from affecting Bangladesh, the United States has an interest in government capacity building in Bangladesh, to ensure capabilities in contracting and project oversight.

Recommendations for Bangladesh

In her foreign relations, Bangladesh must be "the only girl in the village," attractive to but committing neither to her Chinese suitor nor to her Indian one. Bangladesh must ensure that both her close friend and her far friend have incentives to continue their suits.

38. Address to National Defence Course 2017 under Chatham House Rule by Anonymous 3, 2017, National Defence College, Dhaka.

Bangladesh should maintain and even increase her focus on connectivity in order to take advantage of India's need for connectivity with the Northeast and of China's desire for connectivity with Kolkata.

Bangladesh must also increase its capacity to execute projects. It will do little good to sign trade and development agreements with China if the Bangladeshi side cannot execute them.

Bangladesh should pursue the movement of sunset industries from China. While such industries are becoming less important to the Chinese, they represent for Bangladesh an opportunity to begin moving up the value chain and might also enable greater Bangladeshi penetration of the Chinese market.

Bangladesh must continue to diversify arms sources in order to prevent dependence on any one supplier. Bangladesh should also consider further developing indigenous arms industries, especially those that result in technology transfer.

Bangladesh must avoid too much debt. Every debt, even concessional debt, must be carefully studied to ensure that the returns are worth the price.

Finally, Bangladesh must understand and remain wary of Chinese and Indian motivations. Just as Bangladesh defines and pursues its own interests, so too do China and India and these interests do not always coincide.

Recommendations for the United States

There is no need for the United States to significantly alter either its policy or strategy due to the China-Bangladesh relation. Instead, it should continue its activities with a particular emphasis on the informational and economic instruments of power as it pursues its national interests.

The United States should continue its efforts to develop the Armed Forces of Bangladesh with a focus on professionalization and respect for human rights as well as to peacekeeping training and equipment.

The United States should intensify government capacity-building efforts to enable improvements to Bangladesh's ability to contract and manage the execution of projects and help prevent waste, corruption and economically unsound projects.

The United States should publicize the business opportunities in Bangladesh to the American business community. An information campaign should emphasize both the export market but also the growing domestic market.

The United States should encourage other nations to take advantage of Bangladeshi best practice in disaster preparedness, to develop their own capabilities.

The United States should expand opportunities for Bangladeshis to study in the United States to reinforce human resource development.

Conclusion

Bangladesh is not a powerful country in the realist sense. It has neither great natural resources nor a great industrial base. It is not wealthy and its infrastructure is poor. However, Bangladesh excels in three areas of national power - her geography, her population and her national character. The geographic location of Bangladesh ensures its importance to its neighbors, its population means that there are not just the hands but also the brains needed to develop the country, and its national character – the people’s and leaders’ insistence on maintaining sovereignty and independence – means that powerful nations like China and India cannot simply dictate their relations with Bangladesh. The national power generated by the combination of geography, population and national character of Bangladesh means that Bangladesh is in a strong position in its relations with China and India and the rest of the world. The realization of Vision 2041 and of the Chinese Dream will require cooperation, not conflict. Both nations, one of which at first glance appears weak and poor and the other strong and rich, have a shared interest in the success of the other.

The United States wants Bangladesh to be a model for other developing nations, to “be a prosperous, successful, democratic country that demonstrates unequivocally that democracy is the best path to sustainable development.” The United States does not have an interest in a closer political relationship between Bangladesh and China. Therefore, while continuing and improving its current relations with Bangladesh, the United States must monitor the China-Bangladesh relation. The American interest is served by seeing this relation transcend the strictures of realist international relations theory and become a true win-win proposition. Such a result does not require China to change but it does require Bangladesh to guard its sovereignty and independence and to remember that the Chinese are not helping Bangladesh out of generosity but out of interest. Only then can the interests of all three states be protected and their dreams realized.

Bibliography

1. Ali, A H M 2017, 'Bangladesh Foreign Policy', Address to National Defence Course, 18 June 2017, National Defence College, Dhaka.
2. Anonymous 1 2017, Address under Chatham House Rule, National Defence College, Dhaka.
3. Anonymous 2 2017, Address under Chatham House Rule, National Defence College, Dhaka.
4. Anonymous 3 2017, Address under Chatham House Rule, National Defence College, Dhaka.
5. Anonymous 4 2017, Interview by the author under Chatham House Rule, National Defence College, Dhaka.
6. Anonymous 5 2017, Conversation with the author under Chatham House Rule, National Defence College, Dhaka.
7. Anonymous 6 2017, Conversation with the author under Chatham House Rule, National Defence College, Dhaka.
8. Anonymous 7 2017, Address under Chatham House Rule, National Defence College, Dhaka.
9. Chakravarty, P R 2015, Bangladesh-India Ties: Pragmatic Transformation, Indian Foreign Affairs Journal, Vol. 10, No. 3, pp211-18.
10. Chowdhury, S J 2016, 'The geo-politics of Bangladesh-China relations', <<http://opinion.bdnews24.com/2016/10/13/the-geo-politics-of-bangladesh-china-relations/>>, accessed online 3 April 2017.
11. Department of State 2012, 'Remarks With Bangladesh Foreign Minister Dipu Moni', <<https://2009-2017.state.gov>, accessed online 3 April 2017.
12. 2016, 'U.S. Relations With Bangladesh', <<https://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/3452.htm>>, accessed online 7 July 2017.
13. 2016, 'U.S. Relations With China', <<https://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/18902.htm>>, accessed online 7 July 2017.
14. Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry 2017, 'Bilateral Trade', <https://www.dhakachamber.com/home/Bilateral_Trade>, accessed online 18 July 2017.
15. Dhaka Unb, 2017, 'FTA with Sri Lanka this yr', <<http://www.thedailystar.net/frontpage/fta-sri-lanka-yr-1433335>>, accessed online 15 July 2017.
16. Di Giovanni, J, A A Levchenko and J Zhang 2014, 'The Global Welfare Impact of China: Trade Integration and Technological Change', American

- Economic Journal: Macroeconomics, Vol. 6 No. 3, pp153-83.
17. Ding, Y and X Li 2017, 'The Past and Future of China's Role in the East Asian Economy: A Trade Perspective', Canadian Public Policy, Vol. 43, No. 2, pp45-55.
 18. Economist Intelligence Unit 2017a, 'Country Report, Bangladesh', <<http://www.eiu.com/home.aspx>>, accessed online 13 April 2017.
 19. 2017b, 'Country Report, China', <<http://www.eiu.com/home.aspx>>, accessed online 13 April 2017.
 20. 2017c, 'Country Report, India', <<http://www.eiu.com/home.aspx>>, accessed online 13 April 2017.
 21. Federal Research Division 1988, 'Bangladesh, a country study', <<https://www.loc.gov/item/89600298/>>, accessed online 3 July 2017.
 22. Foot, R 2013, 'Chinese power and the idea of a responsible state', in Zhang, Y and G Austin, eds., Power and Responsibility in Chinese Foreign Policy, 1st ed., ANU Pres, Canberra.
 23. Gracie, C 2017, 'Tales from the New Silk Road', <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/resources/idt-sh/new_silk_road>, accessed online 15 July 2017.
 24. Hazarika, O B and V Mishra 2016, 'Soft Power Contestation between India and China in South Asia', Indian Foreign Affairs Journal, Vol. 11, No. 2, pp139-52.
 25. He, F and X Pan 2015, 'China's Trade Negotiation Strategies: Matters of growth and regional economic integration', in Song, L, R Garnaut, C Fang and L Johnston, eds., China's Domestic Transformation in a Global Context, ANU Press, Canberra.
 26. Hossain, U 2012, 'Foreign Policy', <http://en.banglapedia.org/index.php?title=Foreign_Policy>, accessed online 7 July 2017.
 27. Hu, W 2016. 'India has nothing to fear from closer relationship between China and Bangladesh', <<http://www.globaltimes.cn>, accessed online 17 May 2017.
 28. Hussain, Z Z 2015, 'The "BCIM Regional Cooperation:" An Emerging Multilateral Framework in Asia', Geopolitics, History, and International Relations, Vol. 7, No. 2, pp173-89.
 29. Joint Chiefs of Staff 2015, 'The National Military Strategy of the United States of America 2015', <<http://www.jcs.mil>, accessed online 10 June 2017.

30. Kabir, A 2014, 'Bangladesh and the New Cold War', Defence Journal Pakistan, Vol. 17, No. 9, pp10-11.
31. Kahandawaarachchi, T 2015, Politics of ports: China's investments in Pakistan, Sri Lanka & Bangladesh, University of Washington, Ann Arbor.
32. Kashem, M A 2016, 'Recent Issues in Bangladesh-India Relations: A Bangladeshi Perspective', Space and Culture, Vol. 4, No. 1, pp20-24.
33. Keohane, R and J Nye 1977, Power and Interdependence: World Politics in Transition, 1st ed., Little Brown, Boston.

Author

Colonel Jeffrey P. Gottlieb is a United States Army Officer with over 23 years of experience at all echelons from the platoon to the field army level. He has been stationed in the United States, Germany, Italy, Korea and Bangladesh and has deployed on operations to Haiti, Macedonia, Iraq and Afghanistan. He has extensive experience serving as a tactical leader at the platoon, company and battalion levels; as an operations officer at the battalion, brigade and field army levels; as a trainer and tactical analyst at the brigade level and below; as a planner and manager of new equipment testing; and conducting combined operations with NATO allies and partners and in the Republic of Korea. His most recent tactical assignment was as the Commander of the 4th Squadron, 7th U.S. Cavalry. Colonel Gottlieb's current assignment is as a member of National Defence Course 2017 at the Bangladesh National Defence College.

Colonel Gottlieb is a graduate of the Officer Basic and Advanced Courses, the Command and General Staff Officer's Course, and the NATO Defense College. He is a recipient of the Bronze Star, Meritorious Service, Army Commendation, Army Achievement, Iraq and Afghanistan Campaign, NATO and United Nations medals. He holds an MA from Norwich University and a BA from Princeton University.