



**Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BIISS)**

1/46, Old Elephant Road, Eskaton, Dhaka-1000

**Workshop on**

**National Security and Civil-Military Relations in Bangladesh**

November 16-19, 2009

Dhaka, Bangladesh

**Executive Summary**

**1. Workshop Description**

A four-day workshop on “**National Security and Civil-Military Relations in Bangladesh**” was held at Hotel Westin, Dhaka from 16 – 19 November 2009. It was jointly organized by Bangladesh Institute of International Strategic Studies (BIISS) and Bangladesh Enterprise Institute (BEI) with the support of Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies (APCSS), Honolulu, Hawaii, USA. The purpose of the workshop was to stimulate dialogue among a broad spectrum of security and civil sectors of Bangladesh and develop actionable recommendations to improve national security and civil-military cooperation in the country. The workshop was inaugurated by **Mr. H.T. Imam**, Adviser to the Honourable Prime Minister on Political Affairs, Government of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh. **Major General Tarique Ahmad Siddique, rcds, psc (Retd)**, Adviser to the Honourable Prime Minister on Security, Government of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh graced the Concluding Session as the Chief Guest and received the workshop final report. The workshop participants included members of parliament, former ministers, opposition party members, senior military officials and civil society representatives. The U.S. Ambassador and his staff provided full support to the event.

**2. Background**

Bangladesh has been experiencing civil-military challenges for decades. While the restoration of democratic rule through successful parliamentary elections of 2008 was a positive development, there remain significant trust and confidence issues between the civilian government and the security sector, as demonstrated by the BDR mutiny in February 2009. As civil-military relation indicates the interaction between political institutions and military organizations in the management of state affairs, the importance of continued civil-military dialogue can hardly be over emphasized in the context of our democratic journey. In this backdrop, BIISS and BEI welcomed the idea of APCSS-facilitated workshop.

### **3. Workshop Objectives**

The specific objectives were two-fold. First, to engage a cross section of the security sector and government officials in a meaningful debate about the state of Bangladesh security matters. This was to be a significant interchange that could spur greater change going forward. The second objective was to arrive at a series of concrete recommendations based upon the participants' consensus and present these to the highest security official in the state, Major General Tarique Ahmad Siddique, rcds, psc (Retd), and through him to the Prime Minister of Bangladesh. The contents of the conclusions were intended to be actionable, concise, and possible to implement in the current political climate. Given the range of participants from both sides of the civil-military divide and the current political pressures the government faces to enact security reforms, it was hoped that the workshop recommendations could serve as a template for reform and policy change.

### **4. Workshop Methodology**

The workshop was structured into three segments: 1) priorities for national security and civil-military relations; 2) challenges associated with selected priorities; 3) and the development of recommended responses to fulfill the top priorities. The workshop started off with a series of panels on national security and civil-military relations. This was followed by an electronic survey of the participants and discussion of their prioritized security concerns and perspectives on the security sector's evolving role and change. The survey results provided the basis for identification of common challenges, and these served as a point of departure for the first sessions in the afternoon which separated into groups security personnel and civil society. These sectors distilled their top seven priorities which were then combined and synthesized into ten. The entire group was brought back together and was electronically polled once again to determine their top five priorities as a basis to begin discussions on challenges.

Of the many considered the plenary group selected the following as the major priorities Bangladesh needs to address: 1) Good Governance; 2) Democratization of Political Parties and strengthening Local Governments; 3) Trust Building in Civil-Military Affairs; 4) Responsibility of the Media; 5) and Educational Reform. Terrorism was later added to the priorities. These priorities then provided a basis to debate the challenges associated with them over the course of the second day by two mixed groups of civil and military representatives. This was followed by a series of sessions within which the responses to the priorities, taking into account the challenges, were outlined by the mixed groups. The final stage was structured by a small group of ten synthesizing the findings for the final presentation. Throughout the proceedings, it was repeatedly recognized by the participants and the co-sponsors that the workshop methodology was critical in the driving the workshop towards successful conclusions.

## 5. Key Workshop Findings

### Specific Findings:

- Good Governance: The overwhelming consensus to emerge from the participants was that any gains to be made in civil-military relations had to be brought about through policy changes in good governance. Absence of good governance was identified as the primary security concern. There were a range of challenges associated with this, including inadequate rule of law independent judiciary, political party reform, inadequate parliamentary oversight of Government, ineffective public service commission, reform of civil administration, and inadequate selection and promotion procedures. Responses to these challenges were structured around a range of legislative reforms which involved key military and civilian posts.
- Democratization of Political Parties and Strengthening Local Governments: This priority was central to reducing friction in the civil-military divide. Much of the issue stems from the inability of the parties to devolve power to local levels which can then work with the military in administrative roles. Challenges involved included allowing internal dissent within the parties to emerge, party members being allowed to express dissent freely and elect party leadership, and integrate local party and administrative functions of government. Responses included giving free votes to party members and mechanisms that will force party leadership to devolve power.
- Trust-building in Civil-Military Affairs: The central challenges in this area included the political impediments to security sector development, the inability for the military and government officials to carry out sustained and informed interactions, and for an equitable balance in military redress options to be reached. Responses to these were comprehensive, and included pushing forward to the next step the formation of a national security strategy, within which an autonomous Department of Defense can be formed, and the re-drafting of several elements of military law to provide accountability to the promotions process.
- Responsibility of the Media: The central challenge turned on striking a reasonable balance between the requirements of civil society to have the military provide information to the media, versus allowing the military to retain critical information and withhold it when required. The responses to this challenge turned on strengthening the military's information board which would disseminate in a more consistent fashion security matters to media personnel so as to reduce the uncertainty in media reporting. This response was intended to reduce consistent speculation that accompanies reporting in security matters.
- Educational Reform: The central challenge in the area of education was paired down into challenges associated with civil-military education. The central challenges were structural problems involving the inability for civil-military education to be institutionalized within the defense colleges and universities. Responses turned on integrating programs between the

nation's top military and public schools in order to reduce the misperceptions that arise between the civil and military sides.

- National Security-Terrorism: The central challenge turned on moving forward the existing policy of counter terrorism and more broadly creating a coherent counter-terrorism strategy. The responses to this involved providing further analyses through parliamentary committees on several areas of existing counter terrorism strategy, and to continue to move forward with the SAARC group towards regional institutional integration. There is substantial work being carried out already in this area within the region, and the responses were intended to drive forward and consolidate the developing Bangladesh policy.

### **General Findings:**

- Bangladesh national security policy for the past forty years since independence is carried out on an issue by issue basis. All participants agreed that this approach is unsustainable. Accordingly, any reforms made in the direction of constructing and implementing a coherent strategy for national security must include a variety of participants from all sectors of security and government. These considerations must be added to the current policy process underway within Government. These remarks applied in addition to the counter terrorism strategy currently being developed.
- Lasting civil-military reforms require input from both major parties. Without express consent and deliberation from the opposition (BNP), the tendency emerges for parties to disregard reform and politicize any attempts to put national security on a more productive footing. In having the opposition members' presence and participation in the discussion the consensus-building in the workshop organised was achievable.

### **6. Follow-Up Steps**

The workshop participants and organizers discussed the follow-up steps. They agreed to promote the workshop findings among the civilian and security sectors of Bangladesh through a "Core Group." The "Core Group" would also provide necessary assistance to the Government of Bangladesh in advancing the workshop recommendations. Participants suggested and the BEI and BISS agreed to continue to engage in a periodic review with Government officials in addition to the "Core Group" on the developments and implementations of the workshop findings.