



**Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies**  
1/46 Old Elephant Road, Eskaton, Dhaka 1000

Workshop on  
**Civil-Military Relations: Trust Building**

22-23 June 2010

## **SUMMARY OF THE PROCEEDINGS**

### **1. Introduction**

The Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BIISS) with the support of the Defense Institution Reform Initiative (DIRI), USA, organised a two-day workshop on “**Civil-Military Relations: Trust Building**” at the Dhaka Sheraton Hotel on 22-23 June 2010. This was a follow-up of a workshop held in November 2009 on “National Security and Civil Military Relations in Bangladesh” jointly organized by Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BIISS) and Bangladesh Enterprise Institute (BEI) with the support of Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies (APCSS), Honolulu, Hawaii, USA. In the ‘November 2009 Workshop’ the participants identified lack of trust and confidence between civil-military as one of the primary security concerns. It may well be mentioned here that, as a follow-up step of the said Workshop an informal meeting was held at BIISS Auditorium on 02 March 2010 in which key follow-up issues were identified and a Core Group was formed with a view to promote the workshop findings and also provide necessary assistance to the Government of Bangladesh in advancing the workshop recommendations. In the two-day workshop on “**Civil-Military Relations: Trust Building**” the Inaugural Session of the workshop was held at 1100-1430 hours of the first day. The after lunch sessions of the first day and the whole of second day were devoted on Core Group issues. This report summarizes highlights of this Inaugural Session discussion with the aim to present a summary of the main issues and arguments.

The workshop expected to raise several questions and concerns: What were the common civil-military goals? How could they be promoted? What were the shortcomings and challenges in military’s ability to relate with civil society and how could these be overcome? These were some the questions that were addressed in the plenary, and discussed through exchange of ideas and viewpoints among the participants of the workshop. The objectives of the workshop in relation to the Inaugural Session were:

- a. To identify and promote common goals in building confidence and trust in civil-military relations (CMR) in Bangladesh.
- b. To improve military’s ability to relate with civil society in Bangladesh.

Director General of BISS **Major General Golam Mohammad**, nwc, psc, delivered the Address of Welcome. **Major General Eric Olson** (Retd) of DIRI also gave his Welcome Speech as the co-host. **Mr M. Idris Ali, MP**, Chairman, Parliamentary Standing Committee on Ministry of Defence, Bangladesh graced the occasion as the Chief Guest. **Major General Muhammed Firdaus Mian**, psc, Chairman of Board of Governors of BISS chaired the session.

In the Inaugural session, two papers were presented. **Dr. Syed Anwar Husain**, Professor, Department of History, University of Dhaka, made the first presentation on “Identifying and Promoting Common Goals to Build Confidence and Trust in CMR in Bangladesh”. **Air Commodore Ishfaq Ilahi Choudhury**, ndc, psc (Retd), delivered the second paper on “Improving Military’s Ability to Relate with Civil Society in Bangladesh”.

Following the presentations, **Open Discussion** was convened by the session’s Chair. Distinguished scholars, members of the academia, representatives from foreign missions, multi-disciplinary professional bodies, government agencies and policy makers participated in the discussion, raising a set of questions and queries, as well as giving their valued comments and recommendations.

During lunch, **Major General Olson** (Retd) of DIRI delivered a key note speech on “Thoughts on Building Civil-Military Trust and Confidence”.

## 2. **Addresses of Welcome**

In his Address of Welcome, **Major General Golam Mohammad**, Director General of BISS stressed on the importance of CMR describing it as the working relation between civil and military communities that were involved in dealing with national security. He opined that the state of CMR of a country reflected its capability and efficiency to deal with security matters. In Bangladesh, military was often employed in aid to civil power, like disaster management, relief distribution, preparation of voter list and so on. Therefore, CMR also reflects efficiency of state machinery to undertake and accomplish such tasks. He described previous attempts of BISS to study and further improve the CMR of Bangladesh. He also described the background and objectives of the workshop.

**Major General Eric Olson (Retd)** said that DIRI was a high priority programme of the Office of the Secretary of Defense of USA. He said that every country expected to have a democratic government and a professional military. He emphasized on finding the right balance between the Civil and the Military and in that CMR was an important issue. He gave a small account of the initiatives taken by DIRI to improve CMR in various countries including Bangladesh.

### 3. Paper Presentations

**Dr. Syed Anwar Husain**, Professor Department of History of the University of Dhaka, in his presentation on “Identifying and Promoting Common Goals to Build Confidence and Trust in Civil-Military Relations (CMR) in Bangladesh”, argued that the Bangladesh military was in a progressively steady process of transforming itself from being praetorian to being professional. He stressed on retrieving the kind of trust between the civil and the military that featured during the Liberation War. Beginning with a relevant conceptual construct, the presentation highlighted the components of CMR in Bangladesh, politicisation of the military, post-1990 CMR in Bangladesh, Civil-Military common goals, and building of better CMR in Bangladesh. He concluded his presentation with three observations. First, Bangladesh over the past four decades had both the worst and hopeful times in CMR, and the responsibility rested on both the civil and the military segments of the society; second, no successful coup in Bangladesh took place without overt and sometimes covert support of motivated political elements; and third, CMR in Bangladesh needed to be forward-looking and the necessary changes of mindset involving both sides were in order to keep pace with the fast changing times.

**Air Cdre Ishfaq Ilahi Choudhury**, ndc, psc (Retd), Registrar of BRAC University, Dhaka, in his presentation on “Improving Military’s Ability to Relate with Civil Society in Bangladesh”, argued that CMR generated much debate and discussion in Bangladesh because of the turbulence and trepidations through which the relationship passed over the last four decades. He also mentioned that this relationship, apart from shaping the country’s security structures, often influenced its domestic policies and external relations. The presenter stressed on the importance of re-examining civil-military issues, identifying the shortfalls in order to build a strong and vibrant relationship between the two important segments of the society. After giving a historical background of CMR in Bangladesh, the paper mainly focused on how Bangladesh military could establish better relations with common people/civilians. The role of the civil society, politicians, and government to improve CMR were also discussed. Among other issues were constitutional neutrality, obedience to lawful command, appeal against court martial verdict, compulsory retirement of officers, transparency and accountability, reducing the military-civilian and the military-media gaps. The presenter concluded by stating that strong civil-military relations were based on mutual respect and understanding that were vital for building a democratic society. Military should accept the civilian political supremacy, and at the same time, the political leadership should agree not to politicise the military. There should be responsibilities at all levels – political leadership, bureaucracy, civil society, media and the general public, to build up a strong, institutionalised military to face the new security challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

#### 4. **Open Discussion**

After the presentations, the floor was open to questions, comments and observations of the participants. With respect to CMR, the following discussion took place:

**Ambassador (Retd) Harunur Rashid**, suggested that political leadership, military forces and civil society should have good mutual understanding. According to him, internal instability in a country was the result of divisive society, and that there was very little understanding among the people about military's role in peacetime. He suggested reviving Bangladesh's dormant National Security Council (NSC) in order to rebalance the civil and military authorities.

**Mr Fazlul Haque**, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, National Youth Council, Bangladesh, recounted that both politicians and military officers fought side by side during the Liberation War of Bangladesh. He suggested compulsory military training for the young generation of the country. The youth should be incorporated alongside the military force into national development initiatives.

**Major General Md Mainul Islam**, awc, psc, Chief of General Staff, Bangladesh Army raised question on the definition of CMR. He also raised question on the term "duties in aid to the civil power" based on which Armed Forces are deployed in various internal security duties from time to time. In his view, 'civil power' does not exist. Rather, the expression should be "duties in aid of the civil administration under the order of the political government". He suggested not to confuse defence policy with national security policy as the latter covered wide ranging issues and clarified that a country's defence policy was a part of its national security policy. The difference between terms 'civil' and 'military' was raised, notwithstanding that a military officer in non-military attire, was also a civilian. According to him both military personnel and the civilians were part of the Bangladeshi society. Regarding the media's claim that the military is too secretive about its own functions, he said that there existed some kind of secrecy in every profession and the military was not an exception to that.

**Mr M. A. Haai**, Faculty Member, South East University, Bangladesh, said that the responsibilities of both the civil and the military should be upheld. Transparency and accountability were vital for establishing and maintaining good CMR.

**Brigadier Sajjad Rasul**, Defence Attaché, Pakistan High Commission, Dhaka opposed Air Commodore Ilahi's view that the Bangladesh Army inherited from the Pakistan Army the tendency of looking down on the politicians. He also argued that the Pakistan Army worked under the political government and came forward only when a political vacuum was created. At the functional level, Pakistani Army was much unpoliticized. The Bangladesh Army should have inherited those positive traits from Pakistani Army.

**Dr Amena Mohsin**, Professor of International Relations of the University of Dhaka, said that the title of the workshop suggested that there was some lack of trust

between civil and military. She noticed that both the papers discussed about structural and systemic flaws of the system but none of them had mentioned about the Armed Forces Division (AFD). To her, the AFD was one of the reasons behind the politicization of the military. She stressed on having a general headquarters in Bangladesh. She opined that the deployment of the military in the elections reflected the weakness of the Election Commission.

**Ambassador Zamir**, Chief Information Commissioner agreed with Prof. Mohsin that some areas needed more clarification. Agreeing with many participants that sharing of information was important, he wanted to know whether the Parliamentary Standing Committee could call any Army person for clarification. The recent incidence in Rangamati highlighted the importance of connectivity between army and civil administration. To him, it was interesting to see how the US Armed Forces maintained a good nexus with the media.

According to **Mostafa Kamal Majumder**, Editor of The New Nation, communication between civil and military organs was very important for strong and effective CMR. Civil and military were two distinct systems and mere information sharing was not enough. The Inter Service Public Relations (ISPR) of Bangladesh Armed Forces must have skilled professionals on communication for performing their respective duties.

**Professor Nasim Banu**, Department of Politics and Public Administration of Islamic University, Kushtia, mentioned that there should be more trust to strengthen CMR, and that in a democracy, power should proceed through civilian hands.

**Lieutenant General Mahbubur Rahman (Retd)**, former Chief of Staff, Bangladesh Army pointed out that Bangladesh enjoyed the best CMR in the world. Bangladesh Armed Forces were born through the Liberation War. Ever since, Bangladesh Army had been pro-people and that stance would continue to uphold democracy and the Bangladesh Constitution. He suggested that Bangladesh's political culture would need to grow further in the positive direction.

Responding to the comments and questions of the distinguished participants, **Professor Dr Syed Anwar Husain** opined that poor governance was the crux of all problems in Bangladesh. In the developing countries, military was considered to be the strongest organ of the government. He suggested that the functions of both National Defence and the National Security Council should be left to the relevant experts. In democratic countries, there should be an administration, not power. He lamented that Bangladesh had no defence policy. Regarding the importance of transparency, he mentioned that transparency was a specific term to be understood in the context of governance. He argued that Bangladesh Army was a people's army. Speaking on Bangladesh's political culture, Professor Husain said that there was no political culture; rather a distortion of that. He suggested that Bangladesh should develop a positive political culture first.

While responding, **Air Cdre Ishfaq Ilahi Choudhury** clarified the issue of civil power saying that there were two clauses in Bangladesh's Military law that dealt with aid to civil power. Saying that Bangladesh's Military law had been inherited from the British regime, he emphasized on modification of the inconsistencies contained in it. He said that during Ayub Khan's regime, the army was taught to look down on the politicians. He agreed that there was difference of culture between civil and military. He supported the idea of establishing a MOD with the structure existing in the United Kingdom or the USA where both the civil and military people worked under the same roof. He agreed that AFD was an additional structure. In connection with AFD, he noticed that in Bangladesh despite condemnation, many of the steps taken by the previous autocratic regimes happened to continue. In connection with BDR carnage, he opined that, in the context of the social changes that had taken place over the years; within the military there was a need to bring the officers and soldiers closer.

## 5. **Address by the Chief Guest**

**Mr M. Idris Ali MP**, Chairman, Parliamentary Standing Committee on Ministry of Defence, Bangladesh in his speech as the Chief Guest, stated that trust building between civilian and military was essential in order to work in harmony during war and peace. Trust building was also a vital component in promoting democracy and good governance. Historically, civil-military relationship in Bangladesh had a very significant meaning and the relationship can be traced back to the Liberation War in 1971. According to the chief guest, the absence of a defence policy in Bangladesh was the most important challenge to CMR.

Mr. Idris Ali stated that military spending in Bangladesh was a black hole. Very few were aware of the detailed spending. He emphasised on transparency in military spending. On the issue of a defence policy, he said that Bangladesh was in the process of drafting one. In the event of a defence policy formulation, it would be essential to define the respective roles of military, civilian administration, general public, politicians as well as of the defence think-tanks. Bangladesh's defence should not be a matter of military only. It should be a matter of concern for all. Bangladesh defence should not only rely on conventional military but also peoples participations what was seen in the liberation war. Bangladesh might consider the idea of establishing a kind of national service that would create a reserve force which could be mobilised at a short notice. The member of the national service would be trained by the military. When they enter into the civilian service, Bangladesh would have a civilian setup which is composed by the people who were part of the reserve force. In that way, a sizeable portion of our population could be trained in the military discipline. In course of time, there could be a diffusion of the military culture among civilians, civilian authority and civil administration.

## 6. **Summing Up by the Chair**

**Major General Muhammed Firdaus Mian, psc**, Chair of the Inaugural Session, concluded the session by thanking all presenters and distinguished participants for their presentations and participation. He said that the absence of the national defence policy caused many problems. He also mentioned that the defence policy should be a part of the overall national security strategy. There was a need for a comprehensive national security strategy in which one of the particular elements would be the national defence policy. This policy would complement other related national policies like national diplomatic policy, national economic policy, national agricultural policy and so on.

## 7. **Keynote Speech of Major General Olson (Retd)**

In his key note speech, **Major General Eric Olson (Retd)** said that there were differences between USA and Bangladesh in CMR affairs. At the same time, there were also some common grounds. He categorised CMR in three different levels: first, relation at policy level which involved government activities and in which various actors were different ministries, legislative bodies etc; second, relation at the operational level which involved narrowing down the policy; and third, relation at tactical level which involved daily activities undertaken by the bureaucracy and other actors. He identified some obstacles to good CMR which included cultural gap, political dynamics, differences at operational level and differences at individual or personal level. As for solutions, he proposed the following: first, to ensure routine civil-military interaction, for example, in the area of development plans; second, to establish a form of organisation that would involve civil and military engagement; third, to develop policies and procedures that would bring civil and military together; and fourth, to ensure information flow between civil and military. In this connection, he gave example of the United States Military where the capacity of public relation was regarded as a quality of officers. Finally, he stressed upon education, training etc to enhance CMR.