BIISS JOURNAL, VOL. 47, NO. 1, JANUARY 2026:1-35
DOI: https://www.doi.org/10.56888/BIISSj2026V47n1a1
ISSN: 1010-9536 (Print)

Shahab Enam Khan

SECURITY IN THE ERA OF POST-LIBERAL ORDER: TRANSACTIONAL MULTIPOLARITY AND THE MAKING OF BANGLADESH'S NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY

Abstract

The decline of the liberal international economic order and the emergence of great power competition have created a whole new strategic environment for peripheral and developing states. Bangladesh, positioned at the confluence of South and Southeast Asia and approaching graduation from Least Developed Country status, confronts a transformed global and regional landscape marked by a paradoxical economic resilience amid tariff disruptions, record military expenditures, the race for rare-earth minerals, unmanned systems warfare, and the securitisation of the energy transition and supply chain. This article argues that Bangladesh should integrate economic policy into its national security institutions to reduce exposure to supply-chain coercion and financial vulnerability. The analysis addresses the necessity of integrating economic and security policy within the national security framework and of transforming the bureaucracy, armed forces, and the private sector into an integrated strategic ecosystem. Comparative analysis of the national security strategies of the United States, the United Kingdom, Japan, and China captures distinct security paradigms, from American transactional realism to Chinese holistic security, while offering practical relevance for parliamentary institutional design. The article concludes that Bangladesh's choice is not between development and security, but between strategic autonomy and strategic dependence, in an era of transactional multipolarity that emerged following the weakening of the liberal world order.

Keywords: National Security Strategy, Transactional Multipolarity, Supply Chain Geopolitics, Flexible Realism, Strategic Autonomy, Defence Indigenisation, Holistic Security, Global Security Initiative

1. Introduction

A nation of 175.7 million people, strategically positioned at the crossroads of South and Southeast Asia, with the world's eighth-largest population and an economy increasingly integrated into global supply chains, cannot afford to chart

Shahab Enam Khan, Professor, Department of International Relations, Bangladesh University of Professionals, Mirpur Cantonment, Dhaka, Bangladesh. Professor Khan is a permanent faculty member of the Department of International Relations at Jahangirnagar University, Savar, Dhaka, Bangladesh. His email address is: sekhan@juniv.edu

its course through the turbulent waters of twenty-first-century geopolitics without a coherent strategic compass. Bangladesh stands at a critical juncture, poised to graduate from Least Developed Country status, confronting the transformation of its largest export markets under shifting trade regimes, and situated between two neighbours whose military expenditures are surging. At the same time, their internal dynamics carry direct security implications for Bangladesh. Amid such fluidity in international political and security structures, Bangladesh continues to face unique and evolving security challenges that require a coordinated response beyond a traditional security approach rooted in a kinetic, defence mindset. The absence of a formal, codified national security strategy is not merely an institutional gap; it represents a strategic vulnerability that leaves policymakers without the conceptual architecture necessary to align economic aspirations with security imperatives, coordinate whole-of-government responses to emerging threats, and communicate strategic intentions to both domestic and international audiences.

This article argues that countries that integrate economic policy into national security institutions can demonstrate lower exposure to supply-chain coercion and financial vulnerability than countries that treat economic and security domains separately. This argument highlights that Bangladesh requires a national security strategy adapted to its parliamentary system that integrates economic statecraft with traditional and non-traditional security thinking, engages all stakeholders, including the private sector, and provides the institutional foundations for strategic autonomy and strategic culture in an era of transactional multipolar world structure. Hence, this article addresses three interrelated questions linking Bangladesh's strategic imperatives. First, what institutional architecture can facilitate Bangladesh's effort to integrate economic statecraft with traditional security policy within its parliamentary governance system? Second, how do the national security paradigms of major powers offer transferable lessons for Bangladesh's strategic positioning in the post-liberal world order? Third, what institutional mechanisms can Bangladesh develop to deal with transactional multipolarity while preserving strategic autonomy amid competing great-power and alliance or bloc politics? The article's central argument and the answers to the questions proceed systematically, beginning with an examination of global trends, advancing through a theoretical framework, engaging in comparative analysis of major power strategies, and constructing Bangladesh-specific policy recommendations.

In line with the central argument and the queries, this article advances a causal argument rather than a purely normative policy prescription. The central claim is that states which have institutionally integrated economic policy into their national security frameworks, as demonstrated by the United States, China, Japan, and the United Kingdom, exhibit measurably lower exposure to supply-chain coercion and financial vulnerability than those that maintain separate economic and security bureaucracies. Bangladesh, which currently lacks such integration, serves as the critical case through which this causal relationship is examined, with policy recommendations derived from the findings rather than preceding them. Hence, the objectives of this study are threefold: (a) to establish a causal link between economic-security policy integration and reduced national vulnerability by examining comparative evidence from four major powers; (b) to develop a transferable institutional framework adapted to Bangladesh's parliamentary governance system; and (c) to propose a supply-chain statecraft model that operationalises graduated strategic autonomy for peripheral, export-dependent states navigating transactional multipolarity.

Existing literature on Bangladesh's security challenges has predominantly addressed traditional threats such as border disputes, counterterrorism, and civil-military relations, without systematically engaging with the geoeconomic dimensions of national security. Studies such as Riaz,[1] Kabir,[2] and Ahmed[3] have examined Bangladesh's defence posture and foreign policy hedging, but have not interrogated how supply-chain dependencies, trade concentration, and infrastructure financing create structural vulnerabilities that function as de facto security threats. Titumir has examined that a cohesive and inclusive national security framework should be built on consensus and a clear understanding of our strategic interests, which should include strategic culture beyond military doctrine, encompassing education, diplomacy, and development planning.[4] Moreover, while the small-state security literature has advanced significantly through the work of Baldacchino,[5] Thorhallsson,[6] Long,[7] and Jesse and Dreyer[8] whose work demonstrate that small and peripheral states achieve security through alliance shelter, institutional buffering, and

---

[1] Ali Riaz, "Bangladesh's International Relations with South Asia and Beyond," in *Routledge Handbook of the International Relations of South Asia*, ed. Sumit Ganguly and Frank O'Donnell (London: Routledge, 2022), 258–274.

[2] Mohammad Humayun Kabir ed., *National Security of Bangladesh in the Twenty First Century* (Dhaka: Academic Press and Publishers Limited & BIISS, 2000).

[3] Imtiaz Ahmed, "Bangladesh Foreign Policy: Constraints, Compulsions and Choices," *BIISS Journal* 32, no. 3 (July 2011): 207–218.

[4] Rashed Al Mahmud Titumir, "Time to forge a strategic consensus on national interests," *The Daily Star*, May 17, 2025, https://online91.thedailystar.net/opinion/views/news/time-forge-strategic-consensus-national-interests-3896201.

[5] Godfrey Baldacchino, "Thucydides or Kissinger? A Critical Review of Smaller State Diplomacy," in *The Diplomacies of Small States: Between Vulnerability and Resilience*, ed. Andrew F Cooper and Timothy M Shaw (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 21–40.

[6] Baldur Thorhallsson, "Small States in the UN Security Council: Means of Influence?," *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy* 7, no. 2 (2012): 135–160.

[7] Tom Long, "It's Not the Size, It's the Relationship: From 'Small States' to Asymmetry," *International Politics* 54, no. 2 (2017): 144–160.

[8] Neal G. Jesse and John R. Dreyer, *Small States in the International System: At Peace and at War* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2016).

niche diplomacy rather than military parity, and these frameworks have rarely been applied to Bangladesh's specific condition: a large-population, low-capability state with extreme export concentration and simultaneous dependencies on rival great powers. This article fills that gap by theorising "graduated autonomy" as a small-state response pathway tailored to the conditions of transactional multipolarity, contributing to both the small-state security literature and the emerging scholarship on geoeconomic statecraft in the Global South.

Bangladesh's economic and political transitions are taking place as the international order that shaped the post-Cold War era dissolves. The liberal international economic order, which provided the structural foundation for globalisation and enabled export-dependent economies like Bangladesh to thrive, faces radical challenges.[9] That means the post-liberal world order exposed the decline of liberal internationalism's core assumptions that multilateral institutions, free markets and trade, and rule-based international governance can universally manage anarchy. The second Trump administration's economic nationalism and transactional diplomacy marked a decisive shift away from international institutionalism and multilateralism toward power-based bargaining, reinforcing realist logics of interest maximisation and strategic reciprocity.[10] The Ukraine war, Palestine conflict, and trade and tariff wars further accentuated this rapid transformation by normalising the weaponisation of interdependence through sanctions, energy coercion, and supply-chain disruption, which has eventually converted economic networks, policies, and institutions into instruments of geopolitical competition.[11] In this emerging order, authority derives less from normative legitimacy than from control over strategic nodes—finance, technology, energy, and logistics—signalling a structural transition toward geoeconomic statecraft and asymmetric power projection.[12]

At the same time, the United States' National Security Strategy (NSS) of 2025 represents not merely a policy recalibration but a sea change in American grand strategy—a shift from hegemonic liberalism to what the document characterises as

---

[9] Shahab Enam Khan, "Transactional Multipolarity and the Implications of the US National Security Strategy 2025 for Bangladesh" (unpublished manuscript, submitted for publication in the OCPASS publication, 2025).
[10] Donald J Trump, *Statement on the 2017 National Security Strategy* (Washington, DC: The White House, 2017), https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/DCPD-201700917/pdf/DCPD-201700917.pdf. The statement, dated December 2017, was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on December 18 as part of the 2017 National Security Strategy, (Accessed on January 05, 2026). Also see John J Mearsheimer, The Tragedy of Great Power Politics (New York: W. W. Norton, 2014), 361–388.
[11] Henry Farrell and Abraham L Newman, "Weaponized Interdependence: How Global Economic Networks Shape State Coercion," *International Security* 44, no. 1 (2019): 42–79; Daniel W Drezner, "Economic Statecraft in the Age of COVID-19," *The Washington Quarterly* 43, no. 3 (2020): 7–24.
[12] Robert D. Blackwill and Jennifer M. Harris, *War by Other Means: Geoeconomics and Statecraft* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016), 20–45; Mark Leonard, "Connectivity Wars: Why Migration, Finance, and Trade Are Geopolitical," *European Council on Foreign Relations*, 2016.

flexible realism.[13] As Harding observes in his analysis of the NSS, the document asserts that economic security is inextricably linked to national security and that the interests of the domestic economy are non-negotiable.[14] Simultaneously, China's release of its first-ever national security white paper in May 2025 signals a parallel but distinct transformation in how powers conceptualise security. The white paper's "holistic approach to national security"—encompassing political, economic, technological, cultural, ecological, cyber, and even extraterrestrial domains—reflects an ideological and structural shift in the security paradigm, closely aligned with President Xi Jinping's overarching goal of national rejuvenation by 2049.[15]

These documents are rewriting the global security architecture, necessitating that Bangladesh develop a coherent, codified national security strategy that acknowledges these structural shifts.[16] The principles of national security strategy need to be grounded in the distinct use of geoeconomics that precedes the traditional use of geopolitics and geostrategy in the contemporary international system.[17] In this case, Edward Luttwak's influential thesis proved remarkably prescient in predicting that the post-Cold War era would witness "the admixture of the logic of conflict with the methods of commerce".[18] Luttwak noted that "the methods of commerce are displacing military methods—with disposable capital replacing firepower, civilian innovation supplanting military advancements, and market penetration taking the place of garrisons and bases".[19] This geoeconomic turn necessitates a thorough rethinking of national security that integrates economic and strategic thinking.[20]

Based on Luttwak's thesis and the prevailing national security documents, this article asserts that Bangladesh's national security strategy should synthesise

---

[13] The White House, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, DC: The White House, December 2025), https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/2025-National-Security-Strategy.pdf.

[14] Emily Harding, "The National Security Strategy: The Good, the Not So Great, and the Alarm Bells," Centre for Strategic and International Studies, December 2025, https://www.csis.org/analysis/national-security-strategy-good-not-so-great-and-alarm-bells.

[15] State Council Information Office, China's National Security in the New Era, White Paper (Beijing: State Council Information Office, May 12, 2025), https://english.www.gov.cn/news/202505/12/content_WS6821a417c6d0868f4e8f279b.html. Also see, The Diplomat, 'China's 2025 National Security White Paper: "Holistic Security" Amid Rising Global Tensions,' May 16, 2025, https://thediplomat.com/2025/05/chinas-2025-national-security-white-paper-holistic-security-amid-rising-global-tensions/.

[16] Shahab Enam Khan, "Bangladesh's Economic Future Amid Shifting Geopolitics of Supply Chain" (unpublished manuscript, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Bangladesh, 2025).

[17] Robert L Flood and Ewart R Carson, *"Systems Theory in International Relations,"* in *Dealing with Complexity* (New York: Springer, 1993), 141–142.

[18] Edward N. Luttwak, "From Geopolitics to Geoeconomics: Logic of Conflict, Grammar of Commerce," *The National Interes*t 20 (1990): 17–24.

[19] Luttwak, "From Geopolitics to Geoeconomics."

[20] Blackwill and Harris, *War by Other Means.*

economic statecraft with a coherent, pragmatic security and defence framework and recognise that economic policies and national security policy cannot be treated as separate domains.[21] The analysis proceeds through multiple state structures, theoretical approaches; inquiries into the contemporary global strategic environment including economic resilience amid tariff disruptions, the arms expenditure surge, the race for rare earths, new-generation warfare, and energy transition; analysis of transactional multipolarity and supply chain geopolitics; discussion on comparative security strategies; and proposing a framework for Bangladesh's national security strategy under parliamentary governance.

The selection of the United States, the United Kingdom, Japan, and China as comparative anchors reflects both theoretical rigour and practical relevance for Bangladesh's strategic positioning. These four countries have published well-articulated national security strategies, represent Bangladesh's most consequential international relations, and capture the full spectrum of contemporary security paradigms. The United States serves as the primary architect of transactional multipolarity. As Bangladesh's largest single-country RMG export destination, Washington's friend-shoring and de-risking imperatives directly shape Dhaka's growth and development pathways. China, as Bangladesh's largest import source and a significant infrastructure partner, presents a fundamentally different security paradigm. China's "holistic security" approach transforms developmental relationships into strategic calculations, requiring Bangladeshi policymakers to understand Beijing's expanding definition of security interests.

Japan is a classic case of strategic autonomy maintained within alliance constraints, balancing reliance on the US for security and complex economic interdependence with China. It provides Bangladesh with the most significant bilateral development assistance. Japan also offers a model of parliamentary democracy, seeking to balance competing pressures while remaining committed to overseas development support. The United Kingdom, particularly after Brexit, continues to recalibrate its strategic posture through different levels of Indo-Pacific partnership and engagement, demonstrating how developed states can manage the weakening of structural and institutional power while protecting their normative influence through the Commonwealth connection and British International Investment, which seeks to provide non-coercive partnership alternatives. Bangladesh is a member of the Commonwealth and maintains economic ties with the UK. Collectively, this Atlantic-Indo-Pacific-Asian quadrilateral helps design an analysis that neither privileges any single regional bloc nor isolates the competing security architectures Bangladesh contends with. Hence, Bangladesh's proposed national security strategy,

[21] Shahab Enam Khan, "Bangladesh's Economic Future Amid Shifting Geopolitics of Supply Chain" (unpublished manuscript, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Bangladesh, 2025).

as articulated in this article, rests on a purposeful methodological choice based on five interconnected criteria: (1) geoeconomic significance to Bangladesh's economic and security architecture; (2) illustration of distinct security paradigms; (3) geopolitical spectrum of great power relationships Bangladesh must manage; (4) theoretical application across Atlantic-Indo-Pacific-Asian contexts; and (5) practically feasible institutional design within a parliamentary framework.

The remainder of this article is organised as follows. Section 2 sets the contemporary strategic context by examining five transformative global trends—tariff disruptions, the surge in military expenditure, the rare-earth race, unmanned systems, and energy securitisation—and their specific implications for Bangladesh. Section 3 develops the theoretical framework, synthesising geoeconomics, weaponised interdependence, small-state strategy, and transactional multipolarity into an integrated analytical architecture centred on supply chains as strategic infrastructure. Section 4 undertakes a comparative analysis of the national security strategies of the United States, China, Japan, and the United Kingdom, extracting transferable lessons for Bangladesh's parliamentary system. Section 5 proposes a Bangladesh-specific national security strategy that includes institutional architecture, stakeholder integration, threat assessment, and defence modernisation priorities. Section 6 concludes with reflections on building the strategic culture necessary for sustained implementation.

2. The Contemporary Key Features of the Global Strategic Environment

Bangladesh occupies a distinctive position within the international political and strategic environment, marked by both structural vulnerabilities and strategic opportunities. Geographically, the country is situated at the confluence of South and Southeast Asia, bordering the Bay of Bengal. The Bay of Bengal has gradually emerged as a key point of interest within the Indo-Pacific great power competition. Economically, Bangladesh has achieved impressive growth through export-led industries, with its ready-made garment sector (RMG) generating over US$39.35 billion in exports, making it the world's second-largest apparel exporter.[22] However, this success has created acute dependencies on the United States and the European Union markets. The RMG sector alone accounts for the overwhelming majority of the country's export portfolio, with China accounting for approximately 31 per cent of Bangladesh's imports, including critical inputs for the garment industry.[23] Demographically, Bangladesh's 175.7 million population exposes both a

[22] Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha, "Bangladesh's RMG Exports Notches 8.84% Growth," July 12, 2025, https://www.bssnews.net/at-a-glance/291544.
[23] CEIC, "Bangladesh's Total Imports from China," January 19, 2026, https://www.ceicdata.com/en/indicator/bangladesh/total-imports-from-china.

development challenge and a strategic asset.[24] This includes a young workforce, with 66% belonging to the 15-64 age bracket, capable of driving continued economic transformation, but supporting strategic infrastructure and institutional capacity remains low in the country.[25]

The necessity of a coherent, practical national security strategy becomes evident when Bangladesh's structural position is examined against the backdrop of key transformative, or perhaps disruptive, trends reshaping the international strategic and trade environment. First, the global economy is showing resilience amid tariff disruptions, or the tariff war, while cloaking the continued vulnerability of export-dependent economies with narrow product bases. Second, the record surge in global military expenditure, particularly among Bangladesh's immediate neighbours, forges a security environment that cannot be mitigated by economic growth and development alone. Third, the race for rare earth minerals, and of course, natural resources, has transformed critical materials into instruments of geoeconomic leverage or perhaps as "new oil", with implications for advancement in artificial intelligence and computing, energy transition, and defence modernisation and indigenisation.[26] Fourth, the revolution in unmanned systems and autonomous warfare has radically transformed the cost-production calculus of military capability, generating both asymmetric opportunities and alternatives, as well as new vulnerabilities. Fifth, the securitisation and weaponisation of energy supply and transition have made energy policy inseparable from national security and strategic structures. A look at each of these transformations reveals that Bangladesh cannot afford perpetual strategic drift and must focus on developing coherent frameworks to engage with the emerging international order.

[24] United Nations Population Fund, *Bangladesh Population 2025* (Dhaka: UNFPA, 2025), https://www.unfpa.org/data/world-population/BD.
[25] United Nations Population Fund.
[26] Michael Kern, "The New Oil? Rare Earths Spark Global Power Play," OilPrice.com, October 11, 2024, https://oilprice.com/Metals/Commodities/The-New-Oil-Rare-Earths-Spark-Global-Power-Play.html.

Table 1: Five Transformative Trends Shaping the Global Strategic Environment

Trend	Global Dynamics	Implications for Bangladesh
Economic Resilience Amid Tariff Disruptions	Global GDP growth 2.8% (2026); US tariffs at 17%; major economies adapting through diversification	Export concentration vulnerability; 80%+ reliance on RMG sector; market diversification imperative
Unprecedented Military Expenditure	US$ 2,718 billion globally (2024); 9.4% YoY increase; steepest rise since Cold War	India US$ 86.1B (5th globally); Myanmar +66% surge; regional arms race dynamics
Race for Rare Earth Minerals	China controls 60% of mining and 90% of refining; demand is set to increase by 500% by 2050; Africa holds 30% of reserves.	Supply chain vulnerability; Africa as a strategic frontier; energy transition dependencies
Unmanned Systems Revolution	US$ 400 drones destroying million-dollar tanks; Ukraine producing 5M drones (2025); AI-enabled swarms	Asymmetric capability opportunity; conventional force vulnerability; defence doctrine adaptation
Energy Transition Securitisation	Energy-defence nexus; cyber vulnerabilities in smart grids; critical mineral dependencies	Energy mix transformation; infrastructure protection; renewable component supply chains

Source: Compiled from SIPRI (2025), OECD (2025), World Bank (2020), CSIS (2025)

2.1 *Economic Resilience Amid Tariff Disruptions*

Despite predictions of disruption from the Trump Administration's tariff wars, the global economy has demonstrated resilience—Goldman Sachs projects global GDP growth of 2.8 per cent for 2026.[27] The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) forecasts global growth moderating from 3.2 per cent in 2025 to 2.9 per cent in 2026, with a rebound to 3.1 per cent in 2027. This resilience, however, does not illustrate structural shifts.[28] Major economies are rewriting their rules of engagement, and alliances are being redrawn.[29] While the long-term impact of the tariff war is yet to be determined, the paradox is that the global economy has shown remarkable resilience

[27] Jan Hatzius, "Macro Outlook 2026: Sturdy Growth, Stagnant Jobs, Stable Prices," Goldman Sachs Research, December 2025, https://www.goldmansachs.com/insights/articles/the-global-economy-forecast-to-post-sturdy-growth-in-2026.

[28] Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, *OECD Economic Outlook* (Paris: OECD Publishing, December 2025).

[29] Al Jazeera, "What is Next for the Global Economy in 2026?", December 26, 2025. https://www.aljazeera.com/video/counting-the-cost/2025/12/26/whats-next-for-the-global-economy-in-2026.

amid disruptions and volatility. However, this resilience reflects the adaptive capacity of major economies with diversified portfolios and robust domestic consumption. The US average effective tariff rate now stands at 17 per cent, five times pre-administration levels, with effects intensifying as firms deplete front-loaded inventories.[30] The critical distinction lies between structurally resilient economies and export-dependent ones with narrow product bases. Bangladesh's reliance on RMG for approximately 84 per cent of exports, concentrated in US and European markets, alongside dependence on Gulf labour markets, creates asymmetric vulnerabilities that global aggregate resilience cannot mask.[31] Hence, Bangladesh must treat export and market diversification not as an economic preference but as a national security imperative, reducing structural exposure to unilateral trade policy shifts in destination markets.

2.2 *The Unprecedented Surge in Global Military Expenditure*

World military expenditure reached US$ 2,718 billion in 2024—a 9.4 per cent real increase, the steepest since the end of the Cold War.[32] The top five spenders (the US, China, Russia, Germany, and India) account for 60 per cent of global spending, totalling US$ 1,635 billion.[33] More consequential for Bangladesh is the regional picture, in which India's expenditure stands at US$ 86.1 billion (fifth globally), Myanmar's surged 66 per cent to US$ 5 billion (Asia's highest increase), and Bangladesh's largest ODA partner, Japan, rose 21 per cent to US$55.3 billion.[34] At the same time, Bangladesh's key trading and development partners in Europe continue to increase defence expenditure. Notably, NATO members spent US$ 1,506 billion in 2024, accounting for 55 per cent of global military spending.[35] All NATO members increased their military spending, with European members accounting for 30 per cent of total NATO spending.[36] Sweden, in its first year of NATO membership, increased military expenditure by 34 per cent to US$ 12.0 billion, bringing its military burden to 2.0 per cent of GDP.[37] As Tian observes, "Major military spenders in the Asia–Pacific region are investing increasing resources into advanced military capabilities. With several unresolved disputes and mounting tensions, these investments risk sending the region into a dangerous

[30] Al Jazeera, "What is Next for the Global Economy in 2026?"
[31] Asian Development Bank, *Transforming Bangladesh's Participation in Trade and Global Value Chains* (Manila: Asian Development Bank, 2023).
[32] Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, "Unprecedented Rise in Global Military Expenditure as European and Middle East Spending Surges," April 28, 2025, https://www.sipri.org/media/press-release/2025/unprecedented-rise-global-military-expenditure-european-and-middle-east-spending-surges.
[33] Stockholm International Peace Research Institute.
[34] Stockholm International Peace Research Institute.
[35] Stockholm International Peace Research Institute.
[36] Stockholm International Peace Research Institute.
[37] Stockholm International Peace Research Institute.

arms-race spiral".[38] This shows that Bangladesh is positioned between a neighbour with the world's fifth-largest defence budget and another experiencing Asia's most rapid military spending growth. This environment exposes the false dichotomy between development and security: credible capability enables meaningful cooperation, and modern security underpins sustainable development. Bangladesh must recalibrate defence planning beyond minimal deterrence, recognising that regional arms dynamics demand proportionate capability investment to maintain diplomatic leverage and territorial integrity.

Table 2: Military Expenditure in Bangladesh's Strategic Environment (2024)

Country	Expenditure (USD)	YoY Change	Global Rank	Strategic Significance
United States	US$ 997 billion	+5.1%	1st (37%)	Primary export market; security guarantor
China	US$ 314 billion	+7.0%	2nd	Largest import source; infrastructure partner
India	US$ 86.1 billion	+1.6%	5th	Primary neighbour; 4th largest air force
Japan	US$ 55.3 billion	+21%	10th	Largest bilateral development partner
Myanmar	US$ 5.0 billion	**+66%**	—	Eastern neighbour, the highest Asian increase

Source: SIPRI Military Expenditure Database (2025)

2.3 *The Race for Rare Earth Minerals*

Critical minerals—cobalt, lithium, nickel, and rare earth elements—have become the "new oil," underpinning AI development, energy transition, industrial and defence modernisation.[39] Rare earth deposits are "essential, unevenly distributed, and deeply embedded in national security.[40] The World Bank predicts that by 2050, demand for clean energy technologies will increase production of certain critical

[38] Nan Tian, as cited in Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, "Unprecedented Rise in Global Military Expenditure as European and Middle East Spending Surges," April 28, 2025, https://www.sipri.org/media/press-release/2025/unprecedented-rise-global-military-expenditure-european-and-middle-east-spending-surges.

[39] Stimson Centre, "Competing for Africa's Resources: How the US and China Invest in Critical Minerals," March 19, 2025, https://www.stimson.org/2025/competing-for-africas-resources-how-the-us-and-china-invest-in-critical-minerals/.

[40] Evertiq, "The World Reorders Its Minerals: Rare Earths at the Close of 2025," December 19, 2025. https://evertiq.com/news/2025-12-19-the-world-reorders-its-minerals-rare-earths-at-the-close-of-2025.

minerals, including graphite, lithium, and cobalt, by 500 per cent compared to 2018.[41] The rare earth materials have thus become central to national security in broader terms.[42] China controls 60 per cent of global rare-earth mining and over 90 per cent of refining capacity, leveraging this dominance through export restrictions and licensing requirements.[43] The US, which depends on China for 77 per cent of its rare-earth imports, views this as an acute supply chain vulnerability.[44] The competition has made Africa, apart from Brazil, India, Australia, Russia, Vietnam, and Greenland, a strategic frontier.[45] The continent holds 30 per cent of global critical minerals, and both Chinese infrastructure investments (the modernised Tanzania-Zambia railway) and US initiatives (the Lobito Corridor) reflect intensifying contestation over upstream supply chains.[46] Bangladesh's strategic engagement with Africa should extend beyond export market diversification to include positioning within emerging critical mineral supply chains—a factor directly relevant to energy transition, AI advancement, industrial upgradation, and future defence indigenisation.

2.4 *Unmanned Systems and New-Generation Warfare*

The astronomical advances in surveillance technologies and unmanned systems, aided by artificial intelligence, have fundamentally altered the cost-capability calculus of modern warfare. Perhaps the rise of drone warfare as a critical feature of the twenty-first-century battlefield and surveillance has radically transformed military doctrines, procurement, and battlefield dynamics.[47] Unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) and maritime devices now serve as key enablers of deep strikes, precision targeting, and real-time intelligence. Ukraine's production trajectory, which was 2 million drones in 2024, projected to reach 5 million in 2025, demonstrates the scale and speed of its adaptation.[48] FPV drones costing US$ 400 now destroy multi-

[41] World Bank, "Mineral Production to Soar as Demand for Clean Energy Increases," May 11, 2020. https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2020/05/11/mineral-production-to-soar-as-demand-for-clean-energy-increases.

[42] Stimson Centre, "Competing for Africa's Resources."

[43] Africa Centre for Strategic Studies, "China's Critical Minerals Strategy in Africa," December 2025. https://africacenter.org/spotlight/china-africa-critical-minerals/. Also see K. Siddiqui, "Rare Earth Critical Minerals: Geopolitics, Supply Chains, and Emerging Tensions," World Financial Review, September 2025.

[44] US Geological Survey, Rare Earths, Mineral Commodity Summaries (Reston, VA: USGS, 2025). https://pubs.usgs.gov/periodicals/mcs2025/mcs2025-rare-earths.pdf..

[45] Nasdaq, "Rare Earth Reserves," Investing News Network, February 2025. https://www.nasdaq.com/articles/rare-earths-reserves-top-8-countries.

[46] United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, *Economic Development in Africa Report 2024: Unlocking Africa's Trade Potential* (Geneva: UNCTAD, 2024), https://unctad.org/publication/economic-development-africa-report-2024.

[47] Centre for European Policy Analysis, "How Are Drones Changing War? The Future of the Battlefield," November 3, 2025, https://cepa.org/article/how-are-drones-changing-war-the-future-of-the-battlefield/.

[48] Centre for Strategic and International Studies, "The Russia-Ukraine Drone War: Innovation on the Frontlines and Beyond," May 29, 2025.

million-dollar tanks; AI-enabled swarms represent the next doctrinal frontier.[49] The Military Drone Market, valued at US$ 15.23 billion in 2024, is expected to reach US$ 22.81 billion by 2030, growing at a compound annual growth rate of 7.6 per cent.[50] China is developing swarm-capable, autonomous targeting systems, while the Pentagon's Replicator program and Sweden's 100-UAV control software signal Western prioritisation of high-volume, low-cost autonomous systems.[51] Traditional platform-centric defence planning, focused on expensive conventional acquisitions, is becoming obsolete. The asymmetric potential is significant, as developing states can build disproportionate defensive capabilities through unmanned systems at a fraction of the cost of conventional systems. Bangladesh's defence modernisation must incorporate unmanned systems not as supplements but as central elements, leveraging their asymmetric potential while developing doctrinal and institutional capacity.

2.5 *Energy Transition as a National Security Imperative*

While the race for rare earths and aerial superiority remains a vital feature of the contemporary multipolar power calculus, the weaponisation of energy has become another facet of warfare. With geopolitics at the forefront of the emerging global order, controlling energy supply now includes controlling the energy transition. Energy transition denotes the quest for energy independence that requires both artificial intelligence and access to critical minerals. Hence, for the first time in history since World War II, the divide between defence and energy has grown thinner. As Drill & Defence analysis concludes, "energy systems no longer sit in the background of conflict. Their stability is intertwined with military activity and with the strategic calculations of both state and non-state actors.[52] NATO now recognises that energy developments directly affect the security environment, while the renewable transition's reliance on critical minerals supplied by limited producers creates new vulnerabilities.[53] Simultaneously, automated and decentralised energy

[49] Centre for International Governance Innovation, "Drone Technology Is Transforming Warfare in Real Time," October 2024, https://www.cigionline.org/articles/drone-technology-is-transforming-warfare-in-real-time/. Also see, Centre for Strategic and International Studies, "The Russia-Ukraine Drone War: Innovation on the Frontlines and Beyond," May 29, 2025, https://www.csis.org/analysis/russia-ukraine-drone-war-innovation-frontlines-and-beyond.

[50] "AI in Military Drones: Transforming Modern Warfare (2025-2030)," Markets and Markets, 2025, https://www.marketsandmarkets.com/ResearchInsight/ai-in-military-drones-transforming-modern-warfare.asp. Also see, CNA Corporation, "PRC concepts for UAV swarms in future warfare," October 2025, https://www.cna.org/reports/2025/07/PRC-Concepts-for-UAV-Swarms-in-Future-Warfare.pdf.

[51] Centre for European Policy Analysis, "How Are Drones Changing War?" Also see, Defence Security Monitor, "Drone Wars: Developments in Drone Swarm Technology," Accessed January 12, 2026.

[52] Drill & Defence, "Defence and Energy 2025: Five Lessons for 2026," December 24, 2025, https://drillanddefense.com/defense-and-energy-2025-lessons/.

[53] North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, "Energy Security," NATO Topics, December 2025. Also see, Planetary

systems—such as software-managed microgrids and renewable infrastructure—introduce cyber vulnerabilities to critical infrastructure.[54] For Bangladesh, the energy transition is neither purely economic nor purely environmental; it is a strategic process that affects autonomy and resilience. Energy policy must be integrated into national security frameworks, encompassing infrastructure protection, supply chain security for renewable components, domestic capability development, and government-private sector collaboration for technology indigenisation.

3. Theoretical Framework: Geoeconomics, Weaponised Interdependence, Small-State Strategy and Transactional Multipolarity

The preceding analysis reveals a global order in which traditional distinctions between geoeconomics and geopolitics have collapsed. Economic resilience coexists with record military expenditure; critical mineral supply chains have become instruments of coercion; autonomous warfare has transformed cost-capability calculations; and energy transition carries security imperatives. For Bangladesh, navigating this environment requires theoretical frameworks that address both structural constraints and strategic opportunities. Four interconnected concepts provide the analytical architecture: 1. Geoeconomics establishes the strategic logic, 2. Weaponised interdependence identifies the vulnerability mechanisms, 3. Small-state strategy offers navigational pathways, and 4. Transactional multipolarity defines the operational environment. These are not parallel frameworks but nested layers of a single analytical system.

3.1 *The Integrated Framework: From Logic to Operations*

The four concepts operate as sequential analytical layers (see Table 3). Geoeconomics provides the foundational recognition that economic assets constitute strategic resources subject to relative-gains calculations. Weaponised interdependence then specifies how these economic relationships become vectors of coercion through network asymmetries. Small-state strategy identifies the response options available to structurally constrained actors. Transactional multipolarity defines the current operating environment in which these responses must be calibrated.

Security Initiative, "Fifty Years of Transition: How the US Military Transformed Its Estates Energy Strategy," NATO Energy Security Centre of Excellence, May 2025.

[54] US Department of Energy, *Energy Modernization Cybersecurity Implementation Plan* (Washington, DC: US Department of Energy, December 2024).

Table 3: Integrated Theoretical Architecture

Layer	Concept	Analytical Function	Bangladesh Application
Strategic Logic	Geoeconomics	Identifies economic assets as strategic resources	RMG sector, labour remittances as leverage and vulnerability
Vulnerability Mechanism	Weaponised Interdependence	Specifies how network positions enable coercion	Dollar clearing, SWIFT exposure, supply chain chokepoints
Response Pathways	Small-State Strategy	Maps options for constrained actors	Graduated autonomy, supply chain statecraft, selective alignment
Operating environment	Transactional Multipolarity	Defines the rules of current great-power engagement	Conditional arrangements, collapsed hedging space, bilateral deal-making

This layered structure offers a logical synthesis of different approaches that proceeds through four sequential stages. The first stage involves recognising economic assets as strategic resources by adopting a geoeconomic lens to identify what must be protected and leveraged. The second stage requires systematic mapping of vulnerable areas where interdependence can be weaponised, locating the precise chokepoints and surveillance nodes that expose Bangladesh to external influence. The third stage identifies domain-specific autonomy trade-offs, assessing where dependence is pragmatic and where diversification is essential. The fourth stage shows a pathway for continuous calibration of responses to transactional relations and expectations from competing major powers, maintaining strategic flexibility without becoming captive to any single power or bloc.

3.2 *Geoeconomics: The Strategic Logic*

Geoeconomics, as 'the use of economic instruments to promote and defend national interests and to produce beneficial geopolitical results, provides the foundational reframing.[55] Unlike liberal interdependence theory, which posits that economic integration generates mutual benefits and reduces conflict, geoeconomics views trade as statecraft operating on principles of relative gains and strategic rivalry.[56] Schneider-Petsinger (2016) argues that this framework emerged as states recognised that economic tools could project power as effectively as military instruments.[57] For Bangladesh, this demands immediate recalibration of policy. The

[55] Blackwill and Harris, War by Other Means.

[56] Scott A Silverstone, "Liberal International Relations Theory and the Military," in *Handbook of Military Sciences*, ed. Anders M. Sookermany (Cham: Springer, 2022).

[57] Marianne Schneider-Petsinger, "Geoeconomics Explained," Chatham House, December 2016.

US$ 39.35 billion garment sector and Gulf labour remittances cannot remain siloed as commerce or labour ministry concerns—they must be conceptualised as strategic assets within national security planning, simultaneously sources of leverage and vulnerability. When the US Trade Representative reviews tariff preferences, the calculation takes place within geopolitical contexts that factor in Bangladesh's relationships with China, its voting patterns in international forums, and its defence procurement choices.

3.3 *Weaponised Interdependence: The Vulnerability Mechanism*

If geoeconomics establishes that economic assets are strategic, weaponised interdependence specifies how interdependence becomes coercive. Farrell and Newman argue that asymmetric networks enable states controlling central nodes to weaponise structural advantages through two mechanisms: 1. the 'panopticon effect' (surveillance through network control) and 2. the 'chokepoint effect' (restricting rival access to critical flows).[58] This analytical layer maps Bangladesh's specific vulnerability points:

i. **Financial infrastructure:** Dollar dependence means significant transactions pass through US-controlled clearing systems; SWIFT exposure renders financial flows visible to American financial intelligence and vulnerable to exclusion.

ii. **Supply chain nodes:** China controls 90 per cent of rare-earth processing, while the United States builds alternative supply chains that exclude Chinese participation. Bangladesh confronts potential weaponisation from multiple directions.

iii. **Regional chokepoints:** India's control over water flows, border management, and transit routes transforms bilateral irritants into vectors of coercion.

3.4 *Small-State Strategy: Response Pathways*

Before delving into the idea of a small state, a debate dominates in academia over whether Bangladesh is one. The question is less straightforward than it appears and, in Bangladeshi policy circles, surprisingly contested. By the most intuitive

[58]Henry Farrell and Abraham L Newman, "Weaponized Interdependence: How Global Economic Networks Shape State Coercion," *International Security* 44, no. 1 (2019): 42–79. Also see, Jeremy Bentham, Panopticon; or, The Inspection-House (London: T. Payne, 1791).

measure such asterritorial size, Bangladesh is anything but small: at 147,570 square kilometres, it is larger than Greece, Tunisia, or Cambodia. With a population of approximately 175.7 million, it ranks among the world's ten most populous nations, a demographic mass that dwarfs the combined citizenry of the Nordic states. Its economy, the second-largest in South Asia, is projected to exceed the middle-income threshold by 2031, and its garment sector accounts for roughly 84 per cent of export earnings, positioning Bangladesh as a critical node in global supply chains. These facts prompt a recurring objection from policymakers and commentators alike: that applying "small-state" frameworks to Bangladesh amounts to a category error, an intellectual import unsuited to a country of such demographic and economic substance. The debate, while understandable, conflates demographic scale with strategic capacity.

The scholarly consensus in small-state theory has long moved beyond territory and population as defining criteria. Keohane's classic formulation identified small states as those that "cannot, acting alone or in small groups, significantly affect the international system"—a relational and systemic definition rooted in influence, not acreage.[59] Thorhallsson and Wivel further refine the concept by distinguishing between size as a physical attribute and "smallness" as a strategic condition defined by limited capacity to project power, vulnerability to external shocks, and dependence on the international environment for security and prosperity.[60] By these criteria, Bangladesh exhibits the defining characteristics of strategic smallness with unusual clarity: extreme export concentration in a single sector and two destination markets (the US and EU); deep structural dependencies on rival great powers for infrastructure financing, defence platforms, and energy inputs; negligible capacity to shape regional security architecture; and, until recently, the near-total absence of codified strategic institutions. Bangladesh is, in this sense, simultaneously a demographic giant and a strategic small state—a paradox that makes it a particularly instructive case for small-state theory rather than an exception to it.

Accepting Bangladesh's classification as a strategic small state, the third analytical layer of the integrated framework specifies how such states should act. Having identified strategic assets through geoeconomics and vulnerability mechanisms through weaponised interdependence, small-state foreign policy theory specifies response options for structurally constrained actors. While such states tend to trade autonomy for security and formulate strategies in the shadow of great-power interests, scholars have identified conditions under which small states overachieve

[59] Robert O Keohane, "Lilliputians' Dilemmas: Small States in International Politics," *International Organization* 23, no. 2 (1969): 291–310.
[60] Baldur Thorhallsson and Anders Wivel, "Small States in the European Union: What Do We Know and What Would We Like to Know?," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 19, no. 4 (2006): 651–668.

amid great-power competition.[61] Two operational concepts emerge as particularly relevant:

i. **Graduated autonomy:** It suggests Bangladesh can maintain varying degrees of independence across domains while acknowledging constraints in others —accepting security dependence in one sphere to preserve economic autonomy in another, or sacrificing short-term commercial advantages for long-term diplomatic flexibility.[62]

ii. **Supply chain statecraft:** It operationalises graduated autonomy through systematic diversification while treating autonomy as a multidimensional spectrum rather than a binary condition. Bangladesh already practices this instinctively: defence procurement splits between Chinese and Russian platforms; energy imports diversify across LNG spot markets; diplomatic engagement maintains simultaneous channels with Washington, Beijing, Delhi and Tokyo.

The relevance of these small-state response pathways is not merely theoretical; evidence from comparable cases demonstrates their practical efficacy. Singapore, despite having a smaller population than Dhaka's, has institutionalised economic statecraft as a core national security function through the National Security Coordination Secretariat and a deliberate strategy to make itself indispensable to global supply chains in semiconductors, petrochemicals, and financial services—effectively converting economic centrality into security insurance.[63] Vietnam offers perhaps the most instructive parallel: a similarly export-dependent economy that has systematically diversified its trade relationships through 17 free trade agreements, embedded itself in the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) and Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) frameworks, and pursued defence partnerships simultaneously with the United States, Russia, and India—achieving graduated autonomy through deliberate institutional

[61] Anders Wivel, "Small States and Grand Strategy," in *The Oxford Handbook of Grand Strategy*, ed. Thierry Balzacq and Ronald Krebs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 517–532. See, Tom Long, "Small States, Great Power? Gaining Influence Through Intrinsic, Derivative, and Collective Power," *International Studies Review* 19, no. 2 (2017): 185–205. Also see Anders Wivel, Alyson J K Bailes and Clive Archer, "Setting the Scene: Small States and International Security," in *Small States and International Security: Europe and Beyond*, ed. Clive Archer, Alyson J. K. Bailes, and Anders Wivel (London: Routledge, 2014), 3–25.
[62] Hoang Le Thai Vu, Lan Di Ngo, and Thanh Tien Nguyen, "A Spectrum of Autonomy: Towards a Theoretical Framework of Strategic Autonomy," *International Journal: Canada's Journal of Global Policy Analysis* 79 (2024): 230–249.
[63] Yee-Kuang Heng, *Managing Global Risks in the Urban Age: Singapore and the Making of a Global City* (London: Ashgate, 2015), 185–201. See also Syed Mohammed Ad'ha Aljunied, *Securitising Singapore: State Power and Global Threats Management* (London: Routledge, 2019), 40–65.

design rather than ad hoc improvisation.[64] Qatar and the UAE, resource-rich but strategically vulnerable Gulf states, demonstrate how niche positioning in energy, logistics, and mediation diplomacy can generate security dividends disproportionate to military capacity.[65] The common thread across these cases is that small states which have institutionally integrated economic policy with security strategy—rather than treating them as separate bureaucratic domains—demonstrate measurably greater resilience to external coercion, supporting this article's causal argument about the necessity of such integration for Bangladesh.

3.5 *Transactional Multipolarity: The Operating Environment*

The final layer defines the environment in which these strategies must operate. Traditional hedging, as Kuik analyses, involves carefully balancing competing powers through simultaneous engagement.[66] However, transactional multipolarity suggests hedging space has narrowed decisively. The US National Security Strategy 2025 institutionalises a paradigm where nations maximise advantage through bilateral deals rather than multilateral frameworks, explicitly asserting that economic security is national security.[67] This represents a transformation from post-Cold War liberal internationalism: no permanent friends, no permanent enemies—only permanent interests. Every transaction faces evaluation on immediate returns; historical partnerships carry diminishing weight; alliance commitments become contingent on ongoing reciprocity. For Bangladesh, this environment manifests in concrete policy dilemmas. When Washington pressures Dhaka on governance issues, the implicit leverage includes GSP preferences and market access. When Beijing offers infrastructure financing, the tacit expectation includes diplomatic support for Taiwan and the South China Sea. When Delhi influences transit routes, bilateral irritants carry the potential for coercion. Bangladesh cannot fully satisfy any patron without antagonising others, yet it cannot afford to alienate any entirely.

[64] Le Hong Hiep and Anton Tsvetov eds., *Vietnam's Foreign Policy Under Doi Moi* (Singapore: ISEAS–Yusof Ishak Institute, 2017), 1–25. Also see Alexander Vuving, "Vietnam's Strategic Hedging and the Future of Regional Order in the Mekong," in *The Mekong Region in Flux: Infrastructures, Institutions and Identities,* ed. Malcolm Cook (Sydney: Lowy Institute, 2021), 103–118.

[65] Kristian Coates Ulrichsen, *Qatar and the Gulf Crisis: A Study of Resilience* (London: Hurst & Company, 2020), 1–30. Also see Mehran Kamrava, *Qatar: Small State, Big Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013), 11–45.

[66] Cheng-Chwee Kuik, "The Essence of Hedging: Malaysia and Singapore's Response to a Rising China," *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 30, no. 2 (2008): 159–185. Also see Cheng-Chwee Kuik, "Getting Hedging Right: A Small-State Perspective," *China International Strategy Review* 3, no. 2 (2021): 302–319.

[67] The White House, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, DC: The White House, December 2025).

3.6 *Operational Synthesis: Supply Chains as Strategic Infrastructure*

The four theoretical strands converge on a metageopolitical framework: supply chains constitute the infrastructure of strategic autonomy. The operational logic proceeds as follows:

i. **Recognition (Geoeconomics):** Economic assets such as exports, remittances, market access, and ports are strategic resources, not merely commercial activities.

ii. **Mapping (Weaponised Interdependence):** Systematic identification of chokepoints and panopticon nodes across financial, trade, and resource networks.

iii. **Calibration (Small-State Strategy):** Domain-by-domain assessment of autonomy trade-offs, identifying where dependence is acceptable and where diversification is imperative.

iv. **Adaptation (Transactional Multipolarity):** Continuous recalibration of conditional arrangements as great-power demands shift, maintaining flexibility without becoming captive to any single patron.

This integrated framework demands that Bangladesh move beyond reactive hedging toward intentional geoeconomic statecraft: systematic vulnerability mapping; diversification pathway identification; institutional capacity for transactional negotiation; and a strategic culture that treats economic resilience as the foundation of national security. The theoretical architecture outlined here is calibrated for an era in which liberal internationalism's certainties no longer hold and permanent interests alone endure.

4. Comparative National Security Strategies and Defence Doctrines

The theoretical frameworks lay the foundations for understanding the strategic policy tools states use to translate these concepts into institutional frameworks. The analysis of national security strategies from the United States, China, Japan, and the United Kingdom reveals distinct paradigms shaped by history, geography, economy, and domestic political structures, which collectively offer Bangladesh a repertoire of approaches rather than a single policy template. The cases illuminate not only what each national prioritises but also show how they reconcile the inherent tensions between economic interests and security imperatives, between alliance commitments and strategic autonomy, and domestic constituencies and international pressures. For

Bangladesh, the value lies not in wholesale adoption of any single model but in extracting transferable lessons that can be adapted to its parliamentary framework and unique geostrategic circumstances.

Table 4: Comparative National Security Paradigms — Lessons for Bangladesh

Country	Security Paradigm	Key Features	Relevance to BD	Key Lesson
United States	Transactional Realism; "Flexible Realism"	Economic security = national security; friend-shoring; de-risking	Largest RMG export market	Integrate economic and security policy
China	Holistic Security; GSI framework	Multi-domain security; development-security nexus; hyper-securitisation	Largest import source: BRI partner	Understand strategic dependency risks
Japan	Alliance-Constrained Autonomy	Parliamentary NSC; defence indigenisation; FOIP vision	Largest bilateral ODA partner	Parliamentary NSC model: balance competing pressures
United Kingdom	Post-Hegemonic Normative Influence	Joint Parliamentary Committee; Indo-Pacific tilt; cognitive dissonance on China	Commonwealth; BII finance	Parliamentary oversight; manage economic-security tensions

Source: Author's analysis based on NSS 2025, China White Paper 2025, Japan NSS 2022, UK SDR 2025

4.1 *The United States: Integrating Economic and Security Policy*

The US National Security Strategy (NSS) 2025 provides the primary case study for understanding how major powers are reconceptualising national security.[68] The document explicitly aligns the US industrial base and technological advancement as core components of national power, institutionalising the geoeconomic turn by treating economic security as inseparable from national security.[69] US military expenditure of US$997 billion in 2024 accounted for 37 per cent of global military spending, with particular emphasis on AI-driven warfare systems, nuclear weapons enhancements, and the development of space command.[70] The Brookings Institution's analysis of the NSS highlights its reorientation toward the Western Hemisphere and reassertion

[68] The White House, *National Security Strategy.*

[69] Emily Harding, "The National Security Strategy: The Good, the Not So Great, and the Alarm Bells," Centre for Strategic and International Studies, December 2025.

[70] Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, "Unprecedented Rise in Global Military Expenditure as European and Middle East Spending Surges," April 28, 2025, https://www.sipri.org/media/press-release/2025/unprecedented-rise-global-military-expenditure-european-and-middle-east-spending-surges.. Also see, Spherical Insights, "Top 10 Defence Spenders in 2025: Statistics and Analysis," May 28, 2025, https://www.sphericalinsights.com/blogs/top-10-defense-spending-countries-in-2025-statistics-and-facts-analysis-2024-to-2035.

of the Monroe Doctrine, signalling a potential recalibration of American engagement priorities.[71] The strategy emphasises countering China's presence across regions, from Latin American ports to critical infrastructure, while maintaining "iron-clad" commitments to Asian allies.[72] This dual posture—hemispheric focus combined with Indo-Pacific commitment—creates both opportunities and uncertainties for peripheral states like Bangladesh. The lesson for Bangladesh is not to replicate American strategy but to recognise that the separation of economic and security policy is an anachronism.[73] Any national security strategy must account for trade dependencies, supply chain vulnerabilities (particularly in critical minerals), financial system integration, technological dependencies, and the transformable battlefield environment of autonomous systems as security concerns of the first order.[74]

4.2 *China: Holistic Security and Development*

China's 2025 National Security White Paper, released on May 12, 2025, is a crucial document that serves as the key comprehensive articulation of Chinese security policy in a strategic framework.[75] The National Institute for Defence Studies of Japan notes that this framework represents a significant departure from previous Chinese defence white papers, which focused more on military modernisation.[76] Unlike the US NSS 2025, which focuses primarily on multi-layered transactional arrangements within a competitive framework, China's white paper presents security through a multidimensional "holistic" lens encompassing political, economic, military, technological, cultural, ecological, cyber, space, and AI domains.[77] The conceptual foundation rests on Xi Jinping's "holistic approach to national security" (*zongti guojia anquan guan*), which takes "the people's security as its ultimate goal, political security as the fundamental task, economic security as the foundation, and military, technological, cultural, and social security as the guarantee".[78] The white

[71] Brookings Institution, "Breaking Down Trump's 2025 National Security Strategy," December 2025, https://www.brookings.edu/articles/breaking-down-trumps-2025-national-security-strategy/..

[72] Brookings Institution, "Breaking Down Trump's 2025 National Security Strategy".

[73] Shahab Enam Khan, "Transactional Multipolarity and the Implications."

[74] Shahab Enam Khan, "Bangladesh's Economic Future Amid Shifting Geopolitics of Supply Chain" (unpublished manuscript, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Bangladesh, 2025).

[75] State Council Information Office, China's National Security in the New Era, White Paper (Beijing: State Council Information Office, May 12, 2025), https://english.www.gov.cn/news/202505/12/content_WS6821a417c6d0868f4e8f279b.html.

[76] National Institute for Defence Studies of Japan, China Issues a White Paper Concerning National Security, Commentary No. 380 (Tokyo: National Institute for Defence Studies, June 6, 2025), https://www.nids.mod.go.jp/english/publication/commentary/pdf/commentary380e.pdf.

[77] The Diplomat, 'China's 2025 National Security White Paper: "Holistic Security" Amid Rising Global Tensions,' May 16, 2025, https://thediplomat.com/2025/05/chinas-2025-national-security-white-paper-holistic-security-amid-rising-global-tensions/.

[78] State Council Information Office, *China's National Security in the New Era* (Beijing: State Council Information Office, May 12, 2025), https://english.www.gov.cn/news/202505/12/content_WS6821a417c6d0868f4e8f279b.

paper positions China's flagship Global Security Initiative (GSI), which by 2024 had received support from 119 countries, as a potential alternative to US alliance systems, advocating "shared security" and "development-based peace".[79] However, analysts note fundamental tensions between cooperative rhetoric and operational realities: the PLA Navy's expansion to over 370 ships, nuclear arsenal growth projected to exceed 1,000 warheads by 2030, and investments in AI-powered drones and hypersonic missiles suggest "holism in rhetoric, militarism in practice".[80]

For Bangladesh, the white paper's implications function at multiple levels. South Asia, particularly India and Pakistan, receives limited attention despite China's massive economic engagement in the region. This may reflect silence that may reflect strategic ambiguity about Beijing's priorities.[81] The emphasis on protecting "overseas interests," i.e., Chinese investments, personnel, and supply chains abroad, is directly relevant given the scale of Chinese infrastructure investments in Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, the Maldives, and Nepal. The document's framing of the "Asia-Pacific", contrary to the concept of maritime "Indo-Pacific" as a "stable plate," combined with accusations against the US and its "exclusive small groups" for regional instability, positions Bangladesh within competing narratives about regional order.[82] While the US NSS 2025 focuses on economic relationships and tools as instruments of strategic leverage, grounded in the principle of flexible realism, China's white paper presents a potentially totalising vision in which security considerations expand across all policy domains, leading to a whole-of-state approach. For Bangladesh, this creates both opportunities and challenges as the GDI's economy-stability linkages and the GSI's development-security linkages resonate with Dhaka's priorities. At the same time, the hyper-securitisation of bilateral relationships risks transforming regular commercial engagements into strategic calculations subject to political conditionality from Beijing.

---

html.. Also see, Beyond the Horizon ISSG, 'China's National Security in the New Era: Anxious Power, Ambitious Vision,' May 15, 2025, https://behorizon.org/chinas-national-security-in-the-new-era-anxious-power-ambitious-vision/..

[79] Global Security, "China Releases First White Paper on National Security," May 12, 2025, https://www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/library/news/china/2025/05/china-250512-globaltimes02.htm. Also see, Gateway House, 'White Paper on China's National Security,' September 18, 2025, https://www.gatewayhouse.in/white-paper-on-chinas-national-security/.

[80] The Geopolitics, "China's 2025 Security Doctrine: Holism in Rhetoric, Militarism in Practice?," May 27, 2025, https://thegeopolitics.com/chinas-2025-security-doctrine-holism-in-rhetoric-militarism-in-practice/. Also see, US Department of Defence, Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China (Washington, DC: Department of Defence, December 2025), https://media.defense.gov/2025/Dec/23/2003849070/-1/-1/1/ANNUAL-REPORT-TO-CONGRESS-MILITARY-AND-SECURITY-DEVELOPMENTS-INVOLVING-THE-PEOPLES-REPUBLIC-OF-CHINA-2025.PDF.

[81] Observer Research Foundation, "China's National Security White Paper and South Asia's Absence," June 19, 2025, https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/china-s-national-security-white-paper-and-south-asia-s-absence.

[82] East Asia Forum, "China's Defence White Paper Sets Sights on Southeast Asia," October 13, 2025, https://eastasiaforum.org/2025/10/13/chinas-defence-white-paper-sets-sights-on-southeast-asia/.

4.3 *Japan: Parliamentary System and Security Transformation*

Japan's 2022 revision of its National Security Strategy and its subsequent operationalisation offer relevant lessons for Bangladesh.[83] Japan's military expenditure rose by 21 per cent in 2024, the steepest annual increase since 1952.[84] This reflects the strategy's emphasis on comprehensive national power, counter-strike capability, active cyber-defence, economic security, and defence production as integral aspects of defence capability.[85] The strategy endorsed a whole-of-government approach, signifying the complex nature of contemporary threats and security challenges. Most importantly, Japan's strategy emphasises strengthening its defence industrial base, with plans to develop its first-ever defence industry strategy by 2026.[86] The "Synchronised, Hybrid, Integrated and Enhanced Littoral Defence (SHIELD)" program of the Ministry of Defence (MoD) focuses on the mass deployment of low-cost surface, sub-surface, land, and aerial drones for coastal defence.[87] At the same time, Japan's Ministry of Defence has requested that the government provide a record-high US$ 60 billion in 2026 to develop long-range missiles and unmanned aerial systems to strengthen the coastal defence system.[88] Space-based capabilities and enhanced cybersecurity are receiving substantial attention. Japan's National Security Council, with civilian and uniformed personnel working in coordination, demonstrates how parliamentary systems can develop effective national security institutions.[89] The Sasakawa Peace Foundation's (SPF) analysis of Japan's positioning within China's white paper reveals an interesting asymmetry: while Japan devotes substantial attention to China as a security challenge, the Chinese document largely marginalises Japan's significance. This rhetorical move may reflect Beijing's strategic priorities, but it creates risks for regional stability.[90] This asymmetry in

[83] Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, National Security Strategy (Tokyo: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, December 16, 2022), https://www.mofa.go.jp/fp/nsp/page1we_000081.html.

[84] Japan Institute of International Affairs, "The Basic Orientation of Japan's National Security Strategy: International Security Cooperation with Enhanced Comprehensive National Power," AJISS Commentary, June 2023, https://www.jiia.or.jp/en/ajiss_commentary/the-basic-orientation-of-japans-national-security-strategy.html.

[85] Japan Institute of International Affairs, "The Basic Orientation of Japan's National Security Strategy." Also see, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, "Unprecedented Rise in Global Military Expenditure as European and Middle East Spending Surges," April 28, 2025, https://www.sipri.org/media/press-release/2025/unprecedented-rise-global-military-expenditure-european-and-middle-east-spending-surges.

[86] Centre for Strategic and International Studies, "Japan's Present and Future National Security Strategy: Five Key Challenges to Watch," December 17, 2025, https://www.csis.org/analysis/japans-present-and-future-national-security-strategy-five-key-challenges-watch.

[87] Centre for Strategic and International Studies, "Japan's Present and Future National Security Strategy".

[88] US Naval Institute, "Japan's Record $60 Billion Defence Budget Seeks Unmanned Systems and Long-Range Munitions," Accessed January 16, 2026, https://news.usni.org/2025/09/02/japans-record-60-billion-defense-budget-seeks-unmanned-systems-long-range-munitions.

[89] Ministry of Defence of Japan, *Defence of Japan 2019: Outline of the National Security Strategy* (Tokyo: Ministry of Defence of Japan, 2019), https://www.mod.go.jp/en/publ/w_paper/wp2019/pdf/DOJ2019_2-1-3.pdf.

[90] Sasakawa Peace Foundation, "Deciphering China's New National Security White Paper: The Positioning of

threat perception offers lessons for Bangladesh about how great powers may not reciprocally prioritise the concerns of their smaller neighbours. The Japanese model offers Bangladesh a template for institutionalising national security planning within parliamentary governance, integrating defence indigenisation with industrial strategy, focusing on the coastal and aerial defence ecosystem, and adapting to the revolution in autonomous systems while maintaining democratic accountability.[91]

4.4 *The United Kingdom: Economic-Security Nexus*

The UK's evolving national security strategy framework highlights the challenges major powers face in balancing national security and economic prosperity goals. The UK increased its military expenditure by 2.8 per cent to US$ 81.8 billion in 2024, making it the sixth-largest spender worldwide.[92] The UK experience with Huawei's 5G infrastructure exemplifies the difficulties in balancing established alliances with new economic partnerships. The UK-China technology engagement represents a tension highly relevant to Bangladesh's own balancing act between Chinese infrastructure investment and Western security relationships. The UK's Strategic Defence Review, with its Defence Industrial Strategy extending to 2035, illustrates how national security planning must integrate industrial and economic dimensions.[93] The Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy's observation regarding "cognitive dissonance" on China policy highlights the difficulty of maintaining a coherent strategy when economic interests pull in different directions from security considerations—a challenge Bangladesh confronts in its triangular relationships with major powers.[94]

4.5 *Transferable Lessons: Toward a Bangladesh-Adapted Framework*

The comparative analysis yields four operationalisable lessons for Bangladesh's national security architecture. First, from the United States, the imperative of treating economic policy as security policy: Bangladesh must institutionalise mechanisms that subject trade agreements, infrastructure partnerships, and supply chain dependencies to security review. Second, from China, an understanding of how holistic security frameworks can transform routine commercial engagements into politically conditional relationships—Bangladesh must anticipate that deepening economic integration with

Japan in the Security Strategy of China," 2025, https://www.spf.org/iina/en/articles/yamamoto_07.html.

[91] Shahab Enam Khan, "Bangladesh's Economic Future Amid Shifting Geopolitics of Supply Chain" (unpublished manuscript, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Bangladesh, 2025).

[92] House of Commons Library, *The Forthcoming National Security Strategy 2025* (London: UK Parliament, March 11, 2025), https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-10214/CBP-10214.pdf.

[93] Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy, *Revisiting the UK's National Security Strategy: The National Security Capability Review and the Modernising Defence Programme* (London: UK Parliament, 2019), https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/jt201719/jtselect/jtnatsec/2072/207205.htm.

[94] Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy, *Revisiting the UK's National Security Strategy*.

any major power carries embedded expectations regarding diplomatic alignment, requiring deliberate strategies to preserve decisional autonomy. Third, from Japan, an institutional model linked with a parliamentary National Security Council structure that integrates civilian and uniformed expertise, couples defence modernisation with industrial strategy (particularly in unmanned systems and coastal defence), and maintains democratic accountability—Japan demonstrates that parliamentary systems need not sacrifice strategic coherence for democratic process. Fourth, from the United Kingdom, the recognition that "cognitive dissonance" between economic and security imperatives is not a failure of strategy but an inherent condition requiring managed rather than resolved—Bangladesh's simultaneous dependence on Western markets and Chinese inputs will generate persistent tensions that institutional mechanisms must accommodate rather than eliminate. The challenge lies in constructing frameworks robust enough to provide strategic direction yet flexible enough to navigate the transactional multipolarity that now defines great-power engagement with smaller states.

5. Toward a National Security Strategy for Bangladesh

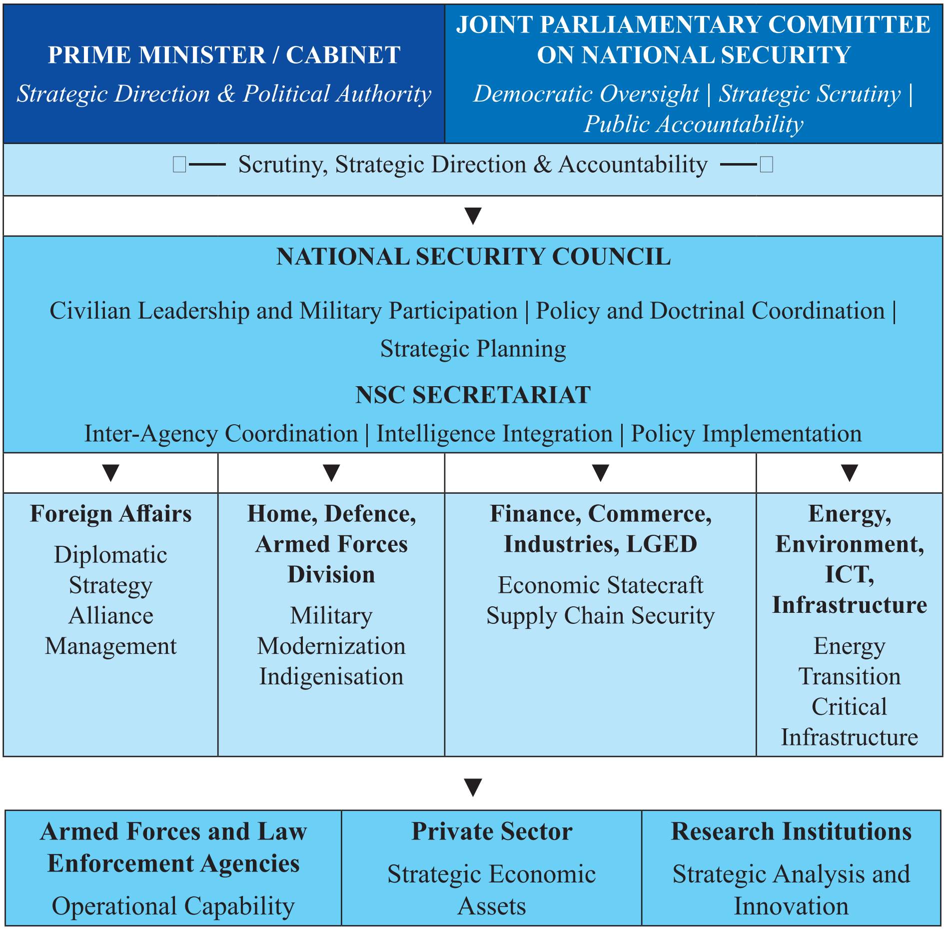
The preceding analysis—from the multiple transformative trends reshaping the global strategic environment, through the theoretical frameworks of geoeconomics, weaponised interdependence, and small-state strategy, to the comparative examination of how major powers conceptualise and institutionalise national security—converges on a single imperative. Bangladesh must move from strategic improvisation to strategic design. The causal logic denotes that the comparative evidence from Section four demonstrates that states which have institutionally integrated economic and security policy exhibit measurably greater capacity to absorb external shocks, resist supply-chain coercion, and maintain strategic coherence than those operating through fragmented bureaucratic channels. Small-state cases reinforce that resilience derives directly from institutional integration, not from military parity with larger neighbours. Bangladesh, which currently lacks any of these mechanisms, is therefore structurally exposed to precisely the vulnerabilities that institutional integration mitigates. The task of this section is to translate this insight into a viable institutional architecture adapted to Bangladesh's parliamentary governance system.

Henceforth, the elements proposed in this section—institutional architecture, stakeholder integration, threat assessment, and alternative global institutions—are not arbitrary components but direct responses to the challenges identified throughout this article. Institutional architecture addresses the coordination failures that prevent coherent responses to geoeconomic pressures and emerging security threats; it provides the mechanisms for whole-of-government action that the US, UK, Japan, and China have all recognised as essential. Stakeholder integration responds to the central insight that in an era of supply chain geopolitics and weaponised interdependence, the private sector is not separate from national security but constitutes a strategic asset that must be incorporated into security planning. Defence modernisation addresses the transformed battlefield environment. The contemporary defence environment renders traditional platform-centric procurement obsolete while creating opportunities for asymmetric capabilities. Threat assessment provides the framework for prioritising Bangladesh's responses to multiple, simultaneous challenges—from immediate regional concerns to longer-term structural vulnerabilities in financial systems and supply chains.

5.1 *Institutional Architecture*

Bangladesh requires institutional reforms to develop and implement a coherent national security strategy within its parliamentary system. Drawing on the Japanese model, this should include a National Security Council with civilian leadership and military participation, supported by a secretariat tasked with planning, designing, and coordinating basic guidelines on foreign and defence policies. Administrative organs across the government should support the Secretariat with personnel and information. The concept of "strategic institutional capacity"—encompassing inter-agency coordination, strategic planning, and adaptive learning processes—must guide these reforms. Parliamentary oversight mechanisms must be established to ensure democratic accountability while enabling strategic coherence. A Joint Parliamentary Committee on National Security, modelled on the UK's approach, could provide scrutiny and strategic direction. The establishment of dedicated research institutions— as examples – Bangladesh Institute for International and Strategic Studies, the Bangladesh Centre for Air and Space Power Studies, Osmani Centre for Peace and Security Studies or Bangladesh Center for Indo-Pacific Affairs—provides intellectual infrastructure for doctrinal development and strategic planning in the era of autonomous systems and new-generation warfare. The comparative analysis of security approaches reveals that effective national security institutions share specific characteristics: integration of economic and security planning, mechanisms for whole-of-government coordination, and the capacity to adapt to emerging threats. Bangladesh's institutional architecture should incorporate these features while accounting for its parliamentary context and resource constraints.

Figure 1: Proposed Institutional Architecture for Bangladesh's National Security Strategy



Source: Author's design adapted from Japan NSC and UK Joint Committee models, with more ministries and agencies to be included in the structure

Figure 1 illustrates a hierarchical institutional architecture for Bangladesh's national security strategy adapted to its parliamentary system.[95] At the apex sits the Prime Minister and Cabinet, providing strategic direction and political authority. Directly below sits the National Security Council (NSC), which, with civilian leadership and military participation, serves as the primary body for policy coordination and strategic planning. The NSC is supported by a Secretariat responsible

[95] For this article, the key ministries were incorporated in this figure. The Cabinet is the apex authority that represents the ministries and various agencies, underscoring its central role in the government structure. However, the NSC secretariat may include a larger pool of ministries, business chambers, and relevant entities. Hence, the incorporation of ministries and agencies should not be seen as limited to the mentioned entities.

for inter-agency coordination, intelligence integration, and policy implementation. The Secretariat coordinates multiple key ministerial pillars such as Foreign Affairs (diplomatic strategy and alliance management), Home. Defence and Armed Forces Division (domestic security, military modernisation and strategic engagements, and indigenisation); Finance, Commerce, Industries, and LGED (economic statecraft and supply chain security); and Energy, Environment, ICT, and Infrastructure-related agencies (energy transition and critical infrastructure protection). These ministries interface with three operational stakeholders—the Armed Forces and the law enforcement agencies (operational capability), the private Sector (strategic economic assets), and Research Institutions (strategic analysis and innovation)—forming an integrated strategic ecosystem. In parallel with the executive, a Joint Parliamentary Committee on National Security provides democratic oversight, strategic scrutiny, and public accountability, operating at the same level as the Cabinet to ensure continuous legislative engagement with national security policy. This design draws from the Japanese NSC model and the UK Joint Committee approach, adapted for Bangladesh's parliamentary context.

5.2 *Integrating Stakeholders and Defence Modernisation*

A coherent national security strategy must engage all stakeholders in developing a strategic culture. Private-sector engagement in supply chain diversification, technology development, and market-access negotiations should be institutionalised rather than ad hoc. The roles of bureaucracy, the armed forces, and the private sector cannot be viewed in isolation, given the weaponisation of supply chains and geoeconomics, which makes everyone interrelated. At the same time, defence modernisation must account for the transformed strategic environment.[96] The lessons of Nagorno-Karabakh and Ukraine are unambiguous: nations without modern air defence, surveillance dominance, unmanned systems capability, and precision-strike capacity are vulnerable to coercion.[97] With India operating the fourth-largest air force and fifth-generation fighter programs, Myanmar acquiring modern combat aircraft, and Pakistan co-developing the JF-17 while acquiring J-10Cs, Bangladesh risks a deterrence gap that could invite the very pressures it seeks to avoid.[98] Critically, defence modernisation must include indigenisation. Over-reliance on any single supplier creates exploitable dependencies—as demonstrated

[96] Shahab Enam Khan, "Airpower Modernisation and Strategic Autonomy" (keynote address at the inauguration of the Bangladesh Centre for Air and Space Power Studies, Bangladesh Air Force, January 18, 2026).

[97] Centre for European Policy Analysis, "How Are Drones Changing War?" Also see, Sun, M, X Cao, X Liu, T Cao, and Q Zhu, "The Russia-Ukraine Conflict, Soaring International Energy Prices, and Implications for Global Economic Policies,' *Heliyon* 10, no. 16 (2024).

[98] The Asia Live, "Bangladesh's Plan to Expand Its Drone Fleet with Bayraktar TB2 Raises Strategic Concerns in India Amid Bay of Bengal Tensions," May 27, 2025, https://theasialive.com/bangladeshs-plan-to-expand-drone-fleet-with-bayraktar-tb2-raises-strategic-concerns-in-india-amid-bay-of-bengal-tensions/.

by nations being denied spare parts during crises and by arms embargoes becoming tools of political coercion. Bangladesh must pursue deliberate diversification while investing in technology transfer, domestic maintenance capabilities, and indigenous production capacity. This approach aligns with global trends such as Japan's defence industry strategy, India's "Make in India" initiative, and even smaller states' efforts to develop domestic defence capabilities, all of which reflect recognition that strategic autonomy requires industrial foundations.[99]

5.3 *Threat Assessment and Strategic Priorities*

In conventional terms, India and Myanmar may continue to dominate Bangladesh's threat perception matrix. India's scale, military capabilities—including a defence budget of US$86.1 billion and the world's fifth-largest military expenditure—and historical interventions in regional affairs require continuous strategic attention. Myanmar's 66 per cent surge in military spending, ongoing internal conflicts, refugee flows, and potential spillover of instability directly affect Bangladesh's security. In non-conventional terms, threats can emerge from non-state and non-conventional sources, ranging from climate change to energy disruption to cyber threats to terrorism to extremism, or perhaps insurgencies. These realities must inform strategic planning while, where possible, seeking cooperative frameworks. That means, beyond traditional security threats, the strategy must address issues such as supply chain vulnerabilities and the race for critical minerals essential to both energy transition and defence modernisation; the revolution in unmanned systems and autonomous warfare; cybersecurity threats to energy infrastructure and digital systems; financial system dependencies and the risk of weaponised interdependence; and climate-related security challenges.[100] The Bay of Bengal and the Malacca Strait corridor remain focal points of great-power competition. Maritime security, port infrastructure development, and aspirations for the blue economy all carry national security implications. Energy transition must be conceptualised as a security imperative, with renewable energy development, grid resilience, and supply chain security for clean energy components receiving strategic attention.[101]

That underscores the urgency of institutional reform in Bangladesh. For example, Bangladesh's Human Development Index (HDI) score is 0.670 (me-

---

[99] Spherical Insights, "Top 10 Defence Spenders in 2025: Statistics and Analysis," May 28, 2025, https://www.sphericalinsights.com/blogs/top-10-defense-spending-countries-in-2025-statistics-and-facts-analysis-2024-to-2035.

[100] Farrell and Newman, "Weaponized Interdependence: How Global Economic Networks Shape State Coercion," *International Security* 44, no. 1 (2019): 42–79, https://doi.org/10.1162/isec_a_00351.

[101] North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, 'Energy Security,' NATO Topics, December 2025, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_49208.htm.

dium human development), ranking 129th globally, revealing persistent gaps in health, education, and social protection that constitute non-traditional security vulnerabilities. The tax-to-GDP ratio hovers at approximately 7.4 per cent—among the lowest globally—severely constraining fiscal space for both defence modernisation and social resilience. Furthermore, export concentration creates an asymmetric vulnerability profile in which economic shocks translate directly into national security crises. However, a counterargument to the integration of economy and security deserves consideration. One critical argument is that in a resource-constrained state like Bangladesh, the very act of institutionalising economic-security integration risks militarising economic policy, crowding out developmental priorities, and provoking the great-power attention that strategic ambiguity has historically helped to deflect. Scholars such as Alesina and Spolaore have argued that small states benefit from economic openness precisely because they avoid the overhead of strategic autonomy,[102] while Katzenstein demonstrated that small European states achieved security through democratic corporatism and flexible adaptation rather than through formal security institutions.[103] These are legitimate cautions. However, the contemporary geoeconomic environment differs fundamentally from the conditions under which these arguments were developed, as interdependence is now actively weaponised, preferential trade regimes are being dismantled, and strategic ambiguity is increasingly penalised by great powers demanding legibility. Bangladesh's choice, therefore, is not between institutionalisation and flexibility, but between deliberate institutional adaptation and involuntary strategic drift.

5.4 *Alternative Institutions for Security*

While the comparative examples of the United States, United Kingdom, China, and Japan offer potential lessons for Bangladesh's future national security architecture, they reflect the national dimensions of the contemporary strategic landscape. The emerging institutional configurations of the RCEP, BRICS, and continental Africa as a strategic frontier offer alternative perspectives on multipolar transactionality, presenting Bangladesh with alternative supply-chain destinations and partnership architectures that need to be an integral part of the national security strategy. As transactional multipolarity intensifies, major powers will increasingly focus on BRICS—either as members shaping its trajectory or as competitors seeking to counter its growing influence. The security priorities of BRICS members, ranging from China's holistic security paradigm to India's strategic autonomy imperatives

[102] Alberto Alesina and Enrico Spolaore, *The Size of Nations* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003), 195–213.
[103] Peter J Katzenstein, *Small States in World Markets: Industrial Policy in Europe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 80–135.

to Russia's challenge to Western institutions, will inevitably shape the grouping's evolution, making it a site of both cooperation and contestation.[104] Nonetheless, BRICS represents a platform for transregional collaboration that transcends traditional geographical boundaries, having evolved from an investment category into an intergovernmental organisation comprising ten countries across four continents.[105] The "new regionalism" exhibited by the BRICS challenges the nation-state-centred paradigm, replacing it with transregional integration in which "trade creates geography"—offering Bangladesh a strategic framework for engagement beyond its immediate neighbourhood.[106] Bangladesh's participation in the New Development Bank, its interest in joining RCEP, and its endorsement of China's Global Governance Initiative reflect recognition that strategic partnerships must extend beyond geographical constraints.[107]

Africa emerges as a strategic frontier for Bangladesh's economic diversification. The continent represents the next frontier for the apparel industry, and Bangladesh's textile-driven economic transformation has become a global industrialisation model that can be leveraged for cross-regional manufacturing partnerships—as demonstrated by the International Finance Corporation (IFC)-sponsored roadshow in June 2023, bringing African manufacturers to Bangladesh.[108] Africa is also central to the global rush for critical minerals, accounting for approximately 30 per cent of the world's supply of cobalt, lithium, nickel, manganese, platinum, and rare earths.[109] Diversifying Bangladesh's economic relationships through engagement with Africa reduces vulnerability

[104] Maria Lagutina, 'Regional Dimensions of BRICS Cooperation,' *Journal of International Analytics* 13, no. 1 (2022): 66–82, https://doi.org/10.46272/2587-8476-2022-13-1-66-82. Also see, Modern Diplomacy, "BRICS Expanded, So What Next?," January 29, 2024, https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2024/01/29/brics-expanded-so-what-next/.

[105] Modern Diplomacy, "BRICS Expanded, So What Next?," January 29, 2024, https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2024/01/29/brics-expanded-so-what-next/.

[106] Maria Lagutina, "Regional Dimensions of BRICS Cooperation," 66–82. See, A. Shameem, "The Evolution of BRICS in International Political Economy," *American Review of Political Economy* (2020), https://arpejournal.com/article/id/168/. Also see, P. A. Jayan, 'BRICS: Advancing Cooperation and Strengthening Regionalism,' *India Quarterly: A Journal of International Affairs* 68, no. 4 (2012): 363–384, https://doi.org/10.1177/0974928412467248.

[107] Global Times, "Bangladesh Economy Set to Gain from RCEP's Diverse Trade Facilitation," October 15, 2024, https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202410/1321410.shtml, (Accessed on January 17, 2026). Also see, Council on Foreign Relations, 'China in the Indo-Pacific: September 2025,' September 2025, https://www.cfr.org/article/china-indo-pacific-september-2025.

[108] World Economic Forum, "How Bangladesh Offers Lessons for Sustainable Industrialisation in Africa," February 2024, https://www.weforum.org/stories/2024/02/how-bangladesh-offers-lessons-for-sustainable-industrialization-in-africa/.

[109] United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, *Economic Development in Africa Report 2024: Unlocking Africa's Trade Potential* (Geneva: UNCTAD, 2024), https://unctad.org/publication/economic-development-africa-report-2024, (Accessed on January 11, 2026). Also see, Centre for Strategic and International Studies, 'Developing Rare Earth Processing Hubs: An Analytical Approach,' July 30, 2025, https://www.csis.org/analysis/developing-rare-earth-processing-hubs-analytical-approach.

to weaponised interdependence by any single power, while frameworks like the African Growth and Opportunity Act create alternative pathways that reinforce rather than undermine relationships with Western markets. This multi-alignment strategy enables Bangladesh to pursue the "graduated autonomy" that the contemporary strategic environment demands precisely.[110]

Beyond BRICS and Africa, the RCEP and ASEAN Sectoral Dialogue Partnership represent critical institutional pathways for Bangladesh's strategic stability. RCEP, which entered into force in 2022 and encompasses 15 Asia-Pacific economies accounting for approximately 30 per cent of global GDP, offers Bangladesh potential access to integrated supply chains spanning China, Japan, South Korea, Australia, and the ten ASEAN member states—precisely the market diversification needed to reduce concentrated export dependencies.[111] Bangladesh's aspiration to achieve ASEAN Sectoral Dialogue Partner status marks a significant diplomatic endeavour , providing an institutional footing in Southeast Asia's premier multilateral architecture and opening pathways toward eventual RCEP membership. Pursuing RCEP accession alongside ASEAN sectoral engagement would position Bangladesh within overlapping institutional architectures that enhance bargaining leverage, provide alternative dispute-resolution mechanisms, and create redundancy in economic partnerships, all of which are essential for national security in an era of weaponised interdependence.

6. Conclusion

This article makes a central proposition that Bangladesh stands at a strategic inflexion point, requiring a fundamental rethinking of how the nation conceptualises, institutionalises, and pursues security in the twenty-first century, particularly as the international order undergoes rapid transformation. The analysis has demonstrated that the post-Cold War assumptions that open markets would remain accessible, that economic interdependence would generate mutual security, and that great power competition would not intrude upon developing or peripheral states pursuing export-led growth no longer hold for Bangladesh's growth trajectory. In their place has emerged a world of transactional multipolarity, supply chain weaponisation, and competing security architectures that demand strategic responses rather than strategic drift. The theoretical framework synthesising geoeconomics, weaponised interdependence, and small-state strategy provides the conceptual tools necessary

[110] Hoang Le Thai Vu, Lan Di Ngo, and Thanh Tien Nguyen, 'A Spectrum of Autonomy: Towards a Theoretical Framework of Strategic Autonomy,' *International Journal: Canada's Journal of Global Policy Analysis* 79 (2024): 230–249, https://doi.org/10.1177/00207020241256000.

[111] Global Times, "Bangladesh Economy Set to Gain from RCEP's Diverse Trade Facilitation," October 17, 2024, https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202410/1321410.shtml.

for navigating this transformed environment; the comparative analysis of US, UK, Japanese, and Chinese approaches provides institutional templates adapted to different forms of governance; and the proposed elements of Bangladesh's national security strategy translate these insights into actionable policy recommendations.

The theoretical foundation for Bangladesh's national security strategy must integrate three conceptual pillars: transactional multipolarity as the operating paradigm of contemporary international relations; supply chain geopolitics as the mechanism through which the economic and security domains interact; and flexible realism as the strategic approach that enables developing states to manoeuvre amid great power competition. These frameworks are complementary rather than competing, together providing an analytical lens on the structural conditions Bangladesh confronts. Bangladesh must learn from the Russia-Ukraine conflict that borders are not a guarantee of good relations. BRICS demonstrates that practical cooperation can transcend geographical proximity. Africa represents a strategic frontier for economic diversification and engagement with the critical minerals economy.[112] Japan's parliamentary model offers templates for institutionalising national security within democratic governance. China's holistic security approach illustrates both opportunities (development-security linkages, GSI's Global South orientation) and risks (hyper-securitisation, strategic dependencies) that Bangladesh must carefully evaluate. The transformed battlefield demands doctrinal adaptation and defence indigenisation.

Constructing a national security strategy within Bangladesh's parliamentary system, therefore, is not an optional exercise but an urgent necessity. The alternative—strategic drift in an era of great power competition, surging military spending, transformed warfare, and competing security architectures—is unacceptable for Bangladesh, seeking its place in the emerging international order. Ultimately, the argument advanced in this article is not merely that Bangladesh needs a national security strategy; it is that Bangladesh already possesses the fundamental requirements for strategic success. The nation's demonstrated capacity for economic transformation and resilience indicates that Bangladeshi institutions can succeed when properly organised and resourced. The armed forces have proven their professionalism through decades of United Nations peacekeeping operations, earning international respect and operational experience. The diplomatic skill that has steered complex relationships with the US, China, and Western powers demonstrates an understanding of global political dynamics. The intellectual capital represented by Bangladesh's universities, think tanks, and policy communities provides the human resources necessary for strategic planning.

[112] World Economic Forum, "How Bangladesh Offers Lessons for Sustainable Industrialisation in Africa," February 2024, https://www.weforum.org/stories/2024/02/how-bangladesh-offers-lessons-for-sustainable-industrialization-in-africa/.

What is lacking is not capability but architecture—the institutional frameworks, coordination mechanisms, and strategic culture that would transform disparate strengths into coherent national power. The causal evidence assembled in this article points unambiguously in one direction that states that have institutionally integrated economic policy with security strategy—whether large powers like the United States and China or small states like Singapore, Vietnam, and Qatar—demonstrate greater resilience to supply-chain coercion, more coherent strategic responses to external shocks, and stronger capacity to preserve decisional autonomy than those that treat economic and security governance as separate domains. Bangladesh, by failing to build such integration, has left itself structurally exposed at precisely the historical moment when the weaponisation of interdependence has become the defining feature of great-power competition. Hence, a National Security Council should be able to integrate state capabilities, parliamentary oversight mechanisms to ensure democratic accountability, public-private coordination platforms to mobilise strategic assets, and research institutions to provide the intellectual foundations for doctrinal adaptation in an era of autonomous warfare and supply-chain weaponisation. The examination of BRICS, RCEP, ASEAN, and Africa as emerging strategic spaces reveals pathways for graduated autonomy that transcend the binary logic of US-China-led competition and institutions. The ultimate measure of success of a national security strategy will not be the documents produced or institutions established, but whether the next generation of Bangladeshis inherits strategic vulnerability or strategic autonomy—dependence on great-power benevolence or the capacity to shape their own destiny in an increasingly competitive world. The choice, as this article has argued throughout, remains Bangladesh's to make.