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COMPREHENSIVE DEFENCE DIPLOMACY AND EFFICIENCY IN UN PEACEKEEPING: BANGLADESH PERSPECTIVE

Abstract

As one of the leading troop-contributing nations to the United Nations (UN) peacekeeping missions, Bangladesh offers a unique opportunity to establish a comprehensive defence diplomacy framework to augment the efficiency and effectiveness of its commitments to peace support. This research posits how the absence of a comprehensive defence diplomacy framework affects Bangladesh's efficiency in UN Peacekeeping Operations (UNPKO). This paper clarifies conceptual aspects of 'defence diplomacy', 'Peacekeeping' and their inter/intra connection to understand the whole spectrum of relations. It analyses existing challenges and limitations in the diplomatic mechanisms and frameworks of military cooperation, government approaches and institutional arrangements that affect Bangladesh's efficiency in pursuing national interests to make the UNPKO sustainable. This qualitative research integrates secondary data sources with Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) to identify some important determinants of successful defence diplomacy and an integrated framework that can optimise Bangladesh's peacekeeping contributions. The results will complement a theoretical account of defence diplomacy in peacekeeping operations and offer practical policy recommendations to build on Bangladesh's role in global peacekeeping endeavours.

Keywords: Defence Diplomacy, UN Peacekeeping Operations, Bangladesh Armed Forces, Defence Cooperation

1. Introduction

"Diplomacy and defence are not substitutes for one another. Either alone would fail", John F. Kennedy said while explaining the US foreign policy priorities to the students of the University of Washington.¹ In the post-Cold War era, defence diplomacy, combining two terms, defence and diplomacy, gets prominence as an

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¹ "Address at University of Washington – Transcript," The John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, accessed March 27, 2025, <https://www.jfklibrary.org/node/11671>

instrument to advance foreign policy in international relations. Defence diplomacy, an evolving concept, has become an integral part of contemporary statecraft, which allows nations to uphold sovereignty while participating in international cooperation and collaboration arrangements. Defence diplomacy can be a positive-sum game for Bangladesh, a country that takes great pride in its contribution to the UN peacekeeping operations. Over the years, it has been one of the world's top Troop-Contributing Countries (TCCs) to UN activities in support of peace and security.² With the modern global security environment being so complex, there are many complex challenges which require a sophisticated understanding of the relationship between defence diplomacy and peacekeeping operations. What used to be traditional peacekeeping has grown into multidimensional peace support operations, including conflict prevention, peace-making, and peace enforcement, as well as the reconstruction of and reintroduction of peace into post-conflict situations. Because of this evolution, broadened defence diplomacy significantly involves much more than traditional military-to-military relations.

The interface between defence diplomacy and UN peacekeeping, therefore, is a multidimensional relationship. UN peacekeeping operations allow countries to display their military capacity and generate worldwide goodwill. Defence diplomacy, defined here as the peaceful application of defence resources and relationships to advance national objectives, provides a framework for aligning peacekeeping efforts with other national strategies. This relationship is under-explored and poorly coordinated in the context of Bangladesh, and resource commitments are suboptimal.³ In today's world, where global security challenges are undergoing continuous change, the functions of defence diplomacy in international relations are changing too, so the subject is of great significance in the area of UNPKO. As a top TCC to UN peacekeeping missions, Bangladesh finds itself at an intersection of both military capability and diplomatic engagement. Since Bangladesh first put boots under the UN umbrella in 1988, it has contributed over two hundred thousand peacekeepers to various UN peacekeeping missions, performing a substantial material contribution to global peace and security; all the while, serving Bangladeshi national interests through military diplomacy.⁴ Along with enhancing Bangladesh's international

² Mesbah Uddin Chowdhury, "The United Nations as Beacon of World Peace and Contribution of Bangladesh in Peacekeeping," *Bangladesh Journal of Multidisciplinary Scientific Research*, (2022), <https://www.cribfb.com/journal/index.php/BJMSR/article/view/1877>.

³ Benazir Ahmed, "Contribution of Bangladesh United Nation Peace Keeping Force to Our National Economy," PhD Thesis, University of Dhaka, (2019), <http://reposit.library.du.ac.bd:8080/xmlui/handle/123456789/345>.

⁴ UN Bangladesh, "Fit for the Future, Building Better Together: Combatting Current Challenges to Peacekeeping United Nations in Bangladesh", May 29, 2024, <https://bangladesh.un.org/en/269941-fit-future-building-better-together-combatting-current-challenges-peacekeeping>, <https://bangladesh.un.org/en/269941-fit-future-building-better-together-combatting-current-challenges-peacekeeping>.

reputation, it has also offered the chance to the country's armed forces to develop professionally by taking part in many UN peacekeeping missions in which Bangladesh has been playing a larger role. Nonetheless, the country has to deal with a number of issues related to the efficiency of its peacekeeping commitments, such as coordination of different stakeholders, optimal resource utilisation and matching diplomatic goals with its operational capacity.

Despite the remarkable contributions of Bangladesh to UN peacekeeping missions, there is an insufficient understanding of the potential of how defence diplomacy can be employed to improve the efficiency of peacekeeping operations. There is no comprehensive framework integrating diplomatic, military and institutional dimensions to institutionalise defence diplomacy with respect to UN peacekeeping missions. Bangladesh's participation in United Nations peacekeeping missions is universally accepted as exemplary—some of the highest in terms of troop deployment. However, the nation has yet to fully harness the potential to use peacekeeping deployment to advance its defence diplomacy objectives. At present, Bangladesh's efforts of defence diplomacy in UNPKO are neglected and carried out in a vacuum detached from the higher level of national and international strategic frameworks. In this regard, there are several apparent systemic and operational challenges to this misalignment. At the national level, there are fragmented efforts and activities rather than a comprehensive framework integrating defence diplomacy with peacekeeping objectives. The key stakeholders—the Armed Forces Division (AFD), Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA), and similar institutions—work in parallel rather than working together. Although peacekeeping provides the opportunity for advancing Bangladesh's interests at the global level, the opportunities to enhance Bangladesh's international strategic visibility and power in the international fora through its peacekeeping contributions are not fully realised, which could be done by the defence diplomacy. To fill this critical gap, the research will attempt to diagnose the present lacunae and subsequently go on to propose a comprehensive defence diplomacy framework for harmonising its application with international peacekeeping commitments. Through this, it will try to improve Bangladesh's strategic posture and leverage returns from global peacekeeping endeavours.

There are multiple reasons why this study is important. First, it discusses a pressing need to address the disconnection between Bangladesh's defence diplomacy and its peacekeeping engagements. This lack of a strategic approach to support the use of peacekeeping contributions as a tool for achieving broader national and international objectives and an inability to adequately leverage the benefits of peacekeeping hampers the nation's ability to maximise its contributions to peace

operations. Second, the study aims to add to the literature on defence diplomacy and peacekeeping, an underexplored and underdeveloped subject in Bangladesh's case. Although defence diplomacy and peacekeeping have independently been studied, very little effort has been devoted to understanding how these two fields are interlocked and their national strategy implications. Third, the outcomes of this research have real-world implications for policymakers, academics and practitioners.

Against such a backdrop, the broad objective of the paper is to outline a comprehensive defence diplomacy framework to enhance Bangladesh's efficiency in UN peacekeeping commitments. This research posits to answer the primary question: how does the absence of comprehensive defence diplomacy framework affecting Bangladesh's efficiency in UNPKO? Specific objectives are to lay the foundations for a clear link between defence diplomacy and UN peacekeeping commitments; to critically assess the challenges of Bangladesh's peacekeeping commitment from the lenses of defence diplomacy; and to propose a comprehensive defence diplomacy framework to enhance Bangladesh's efficiency in UN peacekeeping efforts.

1.2 Literature Review

Defence diplomacy has become the cornerstone of international relations, including activities to strengthen mutual security, peace-making and combating threats to human beings. Defence diplomacy depends on the states' national interests perceived through foreign and defence policy. A whole range of scholarly writings are available on defence diplomacy and peacekeeping, albeit separately. However, scholarly articles or books recommending a defence diplomacy framework in consideration of efficient peacekeeping are not available especially, to talk about from Bangladesh's perspective. The existing literature on defence diplomacy mostly delved into explaining rather conceptual understanding from the states' perspective, conflict management arrangement, cooperation between allies and trust building measures between conflicting states and so on. D Lech elicited defence diplomacy is not 'military plus diplomacy', and there is no universally recognised definition of it.⁵ Absence of definition means states try to adapt defence diplomacy's content to the needs of their own security policy. Lech explained the understanding of defence diplomacy in light of Poland's security and foreign policy.

On the contrary, B Tarak in his article titled "*Defence Diplomacy*" in *north-south relations*', explained how powerful states are influencing subordinate nations

⁵ Lech Drab, "Defence Diplomacy – an Important Tool for the Implementation of Foreign Policy and Security of the State," *Security and Defence Quarterly* 20, no. 3 (2018):57-71, <https://doi.org/10.5604/01.3001.0012.5152>.

through modern peacekeeping and humanitarian efforts utilising military resources. Alfred Vagt's 1956 work, *Defense and Diplomacy*, a book-length study, focuses on the issue of soldiers, diplomats and their occasional overlapping functions.⁶ Other major work is Cottey and Forster's 2004 Adelphi Paper, *Reshaping of Defence Diplomacy*. The study addresses defence diplomacy or strategic engagement between potential adversaries through the twentieth century and to the present day.⁷ As a modern statecraft, defence diplomacy utilises military factors and cooperation mechanisms for the sake of reaching strategic diplomatic goals. Toshio Saito tracked defence diplomacy in Japan and argued that this particular kind of diplomacy fits neatly into two mutually supportive roles: reinforcing Japan's national security and conveying goodwill to the international community.⁸ On the other hand, M Chaer, S Sumarlan and P Widodo look into Indonesia's trilateral cooperative arrangements and their interworking, in particular, the combination of military presence with diplomatic clout.⁹ Hence, there has been a lot of writing on the general framework for defence diplomacy, yet there is not much written about the integration of defence diplomacy with peacekeeping, more so in regions where there is a big UN contribution, like Bangladesh.

Defence diplomacy is also studied as nation states' cooperation/collaboration endeavour for preventing conflict through defence or military resources among the allies against traditional harm or threat. Cottey, Andrew, and A Forster in *The Adelphi Paper* explained how defence diplomacy-peacetime military cooperation and assistance- has traditionally been used for realpolitik purposes of strengthening allies against common enemies. Contrarily, C J Yan and N Jenne, in their journal article '*Velvet fists: The paradox of defence diplomacy in Southeast Asia*', offer a thorough review of defence diplomacy as a means of international statecraft, placing special emphasis on peacekeeping operations as a functional component of defence diplomacy. According to Sabina Olszyk, defence diplomacy forms foreign policy that enhances international security through think tanks as well as strategic dialogues that

⁶ Alfred Vagts, *Defense and Diplomacy: The Soldiers and the Conduct of Foreign Relations*, (NY: King's Crown Press, 1956).

⁷ Andrew Cottey, *Reshaping Defence Diplomacy: New Roles for Military Cooperation and Assistance*, (London: Routledge, 2013), <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/mono/10.4324/9781315000817/reshaping-defence-diplomacy-andrew-cottey>

⁸ Toshio Saito, *Japan's Security Policy*, (National Defense University, Institute for National Strategic Studies, 1999), https://books.google.com.bd/books?id=v_2QAY3BCgkC.

⁹ Muh Idhan Chaer, Sutrimo Sumarlan and Pujo Widodo, "Strategi Diplomasi Pertahanan Indonesia Dalam Kerja Sama Trilateral Cooperative Arrangement (Port Visit Indomalphi 2017-2019)," *Jurnal Diplomasi Pertahanan* 7, no. 3 (2021),

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/362896227_STRATEGI_DIPLOMASI_PERTAHANAN_INDONESIA_DALAM_KERJA_SAMA_TRILATERAL_COOPERATIVE_ARRANGEMENT_PORT_VISIT_IN_DOMALPHI_2017-2019

advocate for sustainable peace.¹⁰ Through an analysis of French intervention in Rwanda and in the Central African Republic, K S Eustache highlights the part played by international cooperation in stabilising fragile states.¹¹ The literature discussed above is mostly focused on international peace through cooperation among the states. But Ruggeri and M Meiske, in their article *'Peacekeeping as a tool of foreign policy'* manifest a different perspective. The study reveals that peacekeeping operations are not deployed solely according to matters of global peace and security, but the deployment of and contribution to peacekeeping operations is increasingly shaped by individual states' foreign and security policy considerations.

The defence diplomacy therefore, is scrutinised and defined through multiple lenses mostly based on states' foreign and defence policies. Evidently, the definition and practices of one country may not be preferable for other countries because of varying interests. From the reviewed literature it has been found that, since 2000, there has been a steady rise in the volume of publications related to defence diplomacy.¹² Journal papers and conference proceedings increasingly predominate, indicating that researchers started a more thorough exploration and discussion of defence diplomacy during this period. This expansion indicates a growing academic focus on defence diplomacy, likely associated with global security issues, the rising significance of multilateral collaboration, and the changing function of defence in international relations. The variety of documents—books, book chapters, and reports—indicate that defence diplomacy has evolved into a multidisciplinary subject, attracting attention from other academic and professional fields.

Now, when it comes to existing literature on peacekeeping operations from Bangladesh perspective, numerous studies focus on various aspects of peacekeeping but none emphasises on the interlinkages between UN peacekeeping operations and defence diplomacy in the context of Bangladesh. Renowned scholars from Bangladesh, Rashed Uz Zaman and Niloy Ranjan Biswas in the last decade have carried out a number of studies on Bangladesh's participation in UN peacekeeping operations. In 2014, Zaman and Biswas conducted research focusing on Bangladesh's Participation in UN Peacekeeping Missions and how it positively impacted Civil–

¹⁰ Sabina Olszyk, "Dyplomacja obronna nowym instrumentem kształtowania bezpieczeństwa międzynarodowego. Obszary działań think tanków w zakresie dyplomacji obronnej," *Rocznik Instytutu Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej* 19, no. 1 (2021):239-260, <https://ies.lublin.pl/rocznik/riesw/2021/1/13/>.

¹¹ Kilwa Sibumba Eustache, "France's military interventions in intra-state armed conflicts in Africa: Comparative study of cases of the Central African Republic, Mali and Rwanda," *International Journal of Innovation and Scientific Research* 45, no. 1 (2019): 62–88.

¹² "Results The Lens - Free & Open Patent and Scholarly Search," *The Lens - Free & Open Patent and Scholarly Search*, accessed March 31, 2025, <https://www.lens.org/lens>.

Military Relations in Bangladesh.¹³ In 2015, the same authors in their journal article titled “South Asian Regionalism and UN Peacekeeping Missions: A Case of ‘and Never the Twain shall Meet?’”, provided an analysis of problems of regionalism in South Asia and how the countries of South Asia including Bangladesh despite being large troops contributing nations in UNPKOs failed to formulate a regional approach to address emerging challenges of UN peacekeeping missions.¹⁴ Later, in the year 2020, Zaman and Biswas, in their journal article, discussed the contemporary transformations in UN peacekeeping missions and the challenges faced by the participating nations in adapting to those emerging realities.¹⁵ In the latest research, Zaman and Biswas focus on how contributing nations’ participation in UN peacekeeping missions especially countries from the global South including Bangladesh, impact their security governance at the national level.¹⁶ Therefore, as can be seen, there is a great dearth of research on the interlinkages between defence diplomacy and UN peacekeeping from a Bangladeshi perspective and formulation of a comprehensive defence diplomacy framework for efficient peacekeeping efforts is missing. This study intends to fill the gap by mainstreaming the discourses of Bangladesh’s own defence diplomacy framework for enhancing efficiency in its UN peacekeeping missions.

The paper has six sections. After the introduction, the second section contains the conceptual understanding of defence diplomacy and peacekeeping. Before delving into the discussion of Bangladesh’s context, the third section makes a comparative analysis of the defence diplomacy framework of three countries viz, the US, China and India. It is to be noted that these three countries are deliberately discussed here to demonstrate how the most advanced military power in the world i.e., the US, the emerging global powerhouse i.e., China and the major regional power in South Asia i.e., India formulate their defence diplomacy and what lessons can be learned from them. Section four discusses the challenges and limitations in the defence diplomacy

¹³ Rashed Uz Zaman and Niloy Ranjan Biswas, “Bangladesh’s Participation in UN Peacekeeping Missions and Challenges for Civil–Military Relations: A Case for Concordance Theory,” *International Peacekeeping* 21, no. 3 (2014): 324-344, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13533312.2014.938913>

¹⁴ Rashed Uz Zaman and Niloy Ranjan Biswas, “South Asian Regionalism and UN Peacekeeping Missions: A Case of ‘and Never the Twain Shall Meet?’” *Journal of International Peacekeeping* 19, no. 3-4 (2015): 249-273, https://www.academia.edu/19283391/South_Asian_Regionalism_and_UN_Peacekeeping_Missions_A_Case_of_and_Never_the_Twain_Shall_Meet

¹⁵ Niloy Ranjan Biswas (with Rashed Uz Zaman) (2020), “Not business as usual’: changing realities and the transformations in peace operations,” *Studia Politologiczne (Political Science Studies)* 56 (2020): 299-317, 10.33896/SPolit.2020.56.18 (https://www.researchgate.net/publication/349420102_'Not_business_as_usual'_changing_realities_and_the_transformations_in_peace_operations)

¹⁶ Niloy Ranjan Biswas, “Understanding Bangladesh’s security governance through peacekeeping assemblage: does contribution matter?” *International Affairs* 100, no. 3 (2024):1089–1110, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iaae076>

framework from Bangladesh's UN peacekeeping mission perspective, and section five makes an effort to suggest a comprehensive defence diplomacy framework for Bangladesh. Section six concludes the paper.

2. Defence Diplomacy and Peacekeeping: Conceptual Understanding

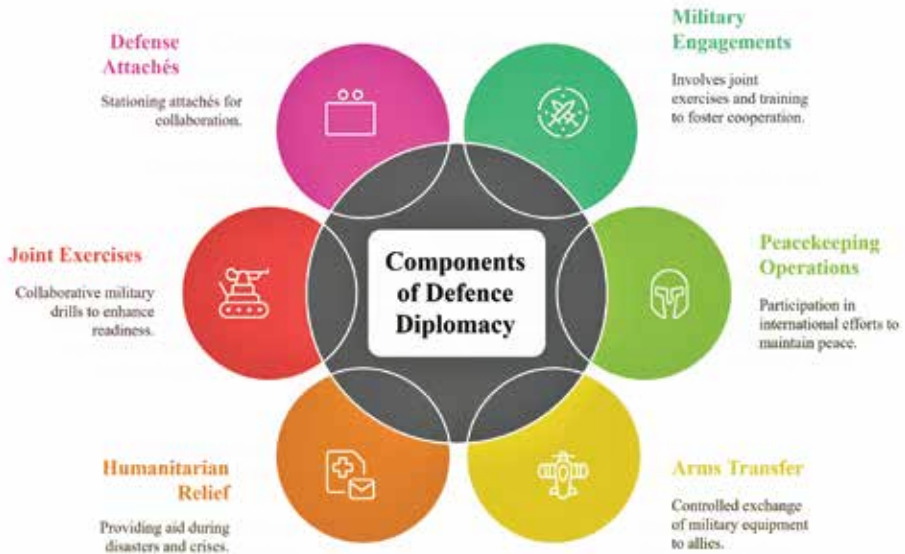
Defence diplomacy does not have a universally accepted definition. Nevertheless, the concept is gradually growing through modification and changes in the realm of diplomacy, defence and foreign policy. For Bangladesh, the concept and functional aspects both are yet to be institutionalised. In simple terms, defence diplomacy is the utilisation of a country's defence and military resources as an instrument in attaining its wider diplomatic purposes and national interests. In a normative notion, it means a broad variety of noncombat activities, which the military does to establish relations, increase cooperation and other mutually beneficial activities for regional and international security. Juan Cheyre Emilio defined defence diplomacy as "employment, without duress [or without urgent international or national constraints], in time of peace of the resources of Defence to achieve specific national goals, primarily through relationships with others".¹⁷ As Budi Pramono elucidates, the concept of defence diplomacy has transformed markedly in the last decade, moving away from purely traditional military alliances to encompass soft power, regional cooperation, and peace-building endeavours.¹⁸ F Charillon, T Balzacq, and F Ramel defined defence diplomacy along the lines of how military resources are used in non-coercive fashions to accomplish foreign policy objectives. Joint training, confidence-building measures and humanitarian missions are all included as other important components.¹⁹ The need for a definition of defence diplomacy for Bangladesh is quite pertinent to understanding the concept, its components and its objectives. For Bangladesh, it may be defined as the employment of defence resources to achieve in a non-coercive way its foreign policy objectives and national interests. The components of defence diplomacy may be military engagements, peacekeeping operations, arms transfer, humanitarian and disaster relief operations, joint exercises and employment of defence attaches/military attaches (DA/MA) or advisors (See Figure 1).

¹⁷ Juan Emilio Cheyre, *Defence Diplomacy* (Oxford University Press, 2013), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199588862.013.0021>.

¹⁸ Budi Pramono, "Defense Diplomacy and Country Existence," *Journal of Defense Resources Management (JoDRM)* 11, no. 2 (2020): 186–94; Agus Subagyo, "TNI in Defense Diplomacy: Strengthening International Military Cooperation," *Central European Management Journal* 31 (2023): 984–991.

¹⁹ Frédéric Charillon, Thierry Balzacq and Frédéric Ramel, "Defense Diplomacy," in *Global Diplomacy: An Introduction to Theory and Practice*, ed. Thierry Balzacq, Frédéric Charillon, and Frédéric Ramel (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2020), 267–278, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-28786-3_19.

Figure 1: Components of Defence Diplomacy



Source: Prepared by the author

Defence diplomacy was subservient to the geopolitics and economics of the Cold War as nations during that period wanted to ally in order to face off against the other bloc. In recent times, the concept of defence diplomacy resurfaced in Great Britain’s Strategic Defence Review of 1998, while discussing the needs of states of the Western Balkans, Central and Eastern Europe. In the review, the nascent concept was addressing the role of military attaches. Eventually, in the post-Cold War era, the tendency to engage in cooperative engagements with a view of building trust and stability was adopted.²⁰ Over the years, defence diplomacy has extended from its traditional scopes and objectives to counterterrorism, disaster response, and cyber defence. Defence diplomacy represents a relevant method for managing today’s security challenges; its alignment with global goals of peacekeeping. As shown in Figure 2, the key objectives of defence diplomacy are promoting strategic alliances, crisis prevention, capacity and confidence building. In order to achieve the objectives, the imperatives are: reduction of suspicion, development of defence engagement, mitigation of military conflicts with early engagements, reinforcement of partnership through joint military activities and alignment of military actions to foreign policy goals.

²⁰ Emmers, Loc cit.

Figure 2: Key Objectives of Defence Diplomacy



Source: Prepared by the author. Ideas borrowed from Charillon, Balzacq, and Ramel²¹

UN Peacekeeping Operations are also classic examples of defence diplomacy as they use defence resources for sustainable peace and security, mostly from a global perspective. According to ‘An Agenda for Peace’ by Boutros-Ghali, “Peace-keeping is the deployment of a United Nations presence in the field, hitherto with the consent of all the parties concerned, normally involving United Nations military and/or police personnel and frequently civilians as well. Peace-keeping is a technique that expands the possibilities for both the prevention of conflict and the making of peace”.²² Peacekeeping usually seeks to preserve peace once it is attained.²³ In the post-Cold War era, peacekeeping was designed to ensure the implementation of comprehensive peace agreements, assist in laying the foundations of sustainable peace, stabilise the security situation, reorganise the military and police, elect a new government and build democratic institutions.²⁴ The peacekeepers undertake a wide variety of complex tasks of helping to build sustainable institutions of governance, human rights monitoring, security sector reforms (SSR), disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) of former combatants. In addition to military forces, different professionals are engaged in the peacekeeping missions—administrators, police

²¹ Charillon, Balzacq and Ramel, “Defense Diplomacy”; Subagyo, “TNI in Defense Diplomacy”.

²² United Nations, “An Agenda for Peace Preventive Diplomacy, Peacemaking and Peace-Keeping.”

²³ ‘Details for: Peace Support Operations and the U.S. Military > SIPRI Library and Documentation Catalog’, accessed January 20, 2025, <https://catalogue.sipri.org/cgi-bin/koha/opac-detail.pl?biblionumber=8517>.

²⁴ Farid Uddin and Abu Salah Md Yousuf, “Evolving Trends of Un Peacekeeping: Challenges for Bangladesh and Its Responses,” *BISS Journal* 35, no. 2 (2014), <https://biiss.org/publication-view/1348578747476873216>

officers, legal experts, de-miners, electoral observers, human rights monitors, civil affairs and governance specialists, humanitarian workers and communication and public information experts.²⁵

A comprehensive defence diplomacy framework is an operational model that encompasses a wide spectrum of political, economic, and military tools to achieve strategic goals. Joint training programs, multilateral exercises, and defence technology collaboration are strategically important parts of a comprehensive framework. Regional and international cooperation, on the other hand, is vital for strengthening the capacity of peacekeeping missions. As a case, Mariano César Bartolomé also noted that Spain is cooperating with Latin American nations under the category of defence diplomacy by using its historical ties.²⁶ Similarly, P Hanggarini, T Sambuaga and S Anwar argue that since Bangladesh's participation in defence training programmes with the US, under the Defence Institutional Reform Initiative, has demonstrated how bilateral partnerships could contribute to capacity building and strengthening peacekeeping capacities.²⁷ Bangladesh is one of the few countries that are involved in UN-led initiatives because of its dependable high operational standards. In the African continent, mostly in conflict zones, the adherence of defence diplomacy imperatives, as mentioned before, is instrumental to establishing relations, increasing cooperation and other mutually beneficial activities for regional and international security. The engagements would make the peacekeeping mission efficient, sustainable and build an environment of trust and confidence. Now, before discussing Bangladesh's challenges and limitations in formulating a comprehensive defence diplomacy framework to enhance its efficiency in UN peacekeeping missions, a comparative analysis of defence diplomacy pursued by the US, China and India may assist in unfolding the parameters of a comprehensive defence diplomacy framework.

3. A Comparative Analysis of Defence Diplomacy: The US, China and India

Defence diplomacy, also referred to as 'strategic engagement', 'military diplomacy,' 'military public diplomacy,' and 'soft power' in many pieces of literature, allows the military forces to have a direct impact on a state's foreign policy through other means. Presently, few Western and Asian countries have well-defined

²⁵ Thijs Brocades Zaalberg, *Soldiers and Civil Power: Supporting or Substituting Civil Authorities in Modern Peace Operations* (Amsterdam University Press, 2006).

²⁶ Mariano César Bartolomé, "Relaciones entre España y América Latina en el ámbito de la defensa," *Revista de Relaciones Internacionales, Estrategia y Seguridad* 10, no. 1 (2015): 111–131, <https://doi.org/10.18359/ries.365>.

²⁷ Peni Hanggarini, Theo Sambuaga and Syaiful Anwar, "A History of the Afghan War (2001-2021) from a Defense Diplomacy Perspective," *HISTORIA: Jurnal Program Studi Pendidikan Sejarah* 12, no. 1 (2023): 155–170, <https://doi.org/10.24127/hj.v12i1.8708>.

defence diplomacy frameworks in designing their military-diplomatic manoeuvre to achieve foreign policy objectives. The experience of countries having substantial peacekeeping footprint and defence diplomacy endeavour, such as the US, China and India, may provide an example how a framework can be tailored to assist peacekeeping operations. In most cases, peacekeeping is a significant tool to achieve foreign policy objectives. Two main perspectives on why countries contribute troops to peacekeeping missions may be mentioned: the idealist perspective and the realist perspective. The idealist perspective suggests that peacekeeping involvement is motivated by altruism and a commitment to promoting international peace. Contrarily, the realist perspective states that countries participate in peacekeeping missions primarily to pursue their own national interests. The national interests are not limited to hard issues such as military and security but also include economic interests and state prestige. National interests can be seen as the motivations that drives countries to also participate in humanitarian action. This is because a state's national interests always take priority.²⁸ This section will make an endeavour to discuss the contemporary framework of defence diplomacy, with an emphasis on the peacekeeping commitment especially, focusing on the US, China and India.

3.1 *The US Model of Defence Diplomacy*

The US military, as an element of national power, has a dominant focus on the projection of soft power through defence diplomacy. The overseas commands of US forces with their inclusive political stature became tantamount to embassies where 'the role of diplomatic negotiator in most cases assumed by the senior uniformed officers.'²⁹ The US government has indoctrinated the policy of attending to national objectives by employing the soft power of the military rather than its coercive or manipulative physical posture to shape the outcome of engagement with partners.³⁰ However, peacekeeping augments the US's ability to execute a national defence strategy for persuading national interests.³¹

²⁸ Nadhifa Aliya Amani, "Infiltrasi Kepentingan Nasional Indonesia Dalam Partisipasi Aktif Pasukan Penjaga Perdamaian PBB," *Hubungan Internasional*, accessed February 11, 2025, <https://www.hubunganinternasional.id/main/blog/34?title=Infiltrasi+Kepentingan+Nasional+Indonesia+dalam+Partisipasi+Aktif+Pasukan+Penjaga+Perdamaian+PBB>.

²⁹ Jacques Richardson, "American Diplomacy Revisited: is "Military Tourism" Essential?" *Foresight* 6 no. 2 (2004): 110–115, <https://doi.org/10.1108/14636680410537574>.

³⁰ Amy Ebitz, "The Use of Military Diplomacy in Great Power Competition," *Brookings (Commentary)*, 2019, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2019/02/12/the-use-of-military-diplomacy-in-great-power-competition/>

³¹ 'Details for: Peace Support Operations and the U.S. Military, SIPRI Library and Documentation Catalog'.

3.1.1 *Functional Overview*

Functions of US defence diplomacy can be categorised under a few broadheads. Defence Support to Public Diplomacy (DSPD)³² includes information operations to reach out to the international community through websites, radio, print and television. For instance, during 2005 humanitarian relief operations in Pakistan, their embedded media reported on US ships delivering aid, helicopters ferrying wounded or engineers repairing buildings. Strategic communication³³ is another inclusive aspect of the US military diplomacy doctrine through bilateral and multilateral dialogue, meetings and defence support. The method includes foreign military sales, financing and military education and training programmes. It also benefits the US combatants to operate in new environments and enhance interoperability. The US military is a major shareholder in multiple continental and global defence agreements where the US has direct military commitments to its partner countries.³⁴ A few important agreements are shown in Table 1. Security cooperation,³⁵ a peacetime strategy involves seven military-diplomatic themes, such as assisting partners in combating terrorism, transforming alliances and building coalitions for the future, cooperating to resolve regional disputes etc.

Table 1: US Defence Agreements

Multinational Agreements	Bilateral Agreements
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • North Atlantic Treaty • Agreement between the US and Australia and New Zealand • Southeast Asia Treaty • Rio Treaty 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Philippine Treaty • Japanese Treaty • Republic of Korea Treaty

Source: US Department of State - Diplomacy in Action.

³² The ability to understand, engage, influence and inform key foreign audiences through words and actions to foster understanding of US policy and advance interests to collaboratively shape the operational environment.

³³ The ability to focus US Government processes and efforts to understand and engage key audiences to create, strengthen or preserve conditions favourable to advance national interests and objectives through use of coordinated information, plans, programs and actions synchronized with other elements of national power.

³⁴ "U.S. Collective Defense Arrangements," US Department of State - Diplomacy in Action, 2020, <https://2009-2017.state.gov/s/l/treaty/collectivedefense//index.htm>

³⁵ The ability of DoD to interact with foreign defence establishments to build defence relationships that promote specific U.S. security interests, develop allied and friendly military capabilities for self-defence and coalition operations, including allied transformation, improve information exchange, and intelligence sharing.

3.1.2 Institutionalised Education/Training

The US military offers formal and institutional training to officers for enhanced understanding of diplomacy and political tools of the statecraft.³⁶ Between 2009 and 2010, the Navy funded more than 1,300 full-time master’s and doctorate degrees, and each year the Department of Defence (DoD) sends several officers to fellowship programs at Washington-based think tanks and special educational opportunities such as the Harvard National Security Fellows program or Olmstead Fellowship. In 2015, the DoD announced plans to push more senior military leaders into civilian graduate-degree programs to ensure that officers receive top-notch education.

Table 2: Education Programme on Defence Diplomacy

Officers	Institution/Course	Programme/Curriculum
Junior Officers	The West Point’s Centre	Study programme on ‘Cultural Understanding and Language Proficiency’
	Reserve Officers Training Centre	Study programme on Cultural Competency and Civil-military Coordination
Mid-level Officers and Civilian equivalent	War Course	Study on Political and Diplomatic Environment
Senior Officers	Public Universities	Civilian undergraduate programmes, full-time masters, doctoral degrees, and fellowship programme to equip senior military leadership with top-notch education on diplomacy

Source: The Role of Military Officers in Foreign Policymaking³⁷

3.1.3 The US Defence Diplomacy and Peacekeeping

Through peacekeeping, the US carries out its defence diplomacy, which in this case utilises the use of military force to achieve broader diplomatic objectives, including the maintenance of global peace and security, disasters and other humanitarian emergencies to enhance the US image as a humanitarian actor.³⁸ According to PolitiFact, the US donates 22 per cent of the UN annual budget which is approximately US\$ 3.3 billion to support peacekeeping missions. The US provides

³⁶ Caroline Bechtel, “Warriors, Scholars, Diplomats: The Role of Military Officers in Foreign Policymaking,” *New Perspectives in Foreign Policy*, (Center for Strategic & International Studies, 2017): 5–7, chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/171220_bechtel_military_officers.pdf?mrc9I8SmQ5CxoDs0sZRONRrfSCp6Qe4e

³⁷ Bechtel, “‘Warriors, Scholars, Diplomats’: The role of Military Officers in Policy Making’.

³⁸ Nina M Serafino, “The Department of Defense Role in Foreign Assistance: Background, Major Issues, and Options for Congress,” Congressional Research Service, accessed February 12, 2025, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/235175692_The_Department_of_Defense_Role_in_Foreign_Assistance_Background_Major_Issues_and_Options_for_Congress.

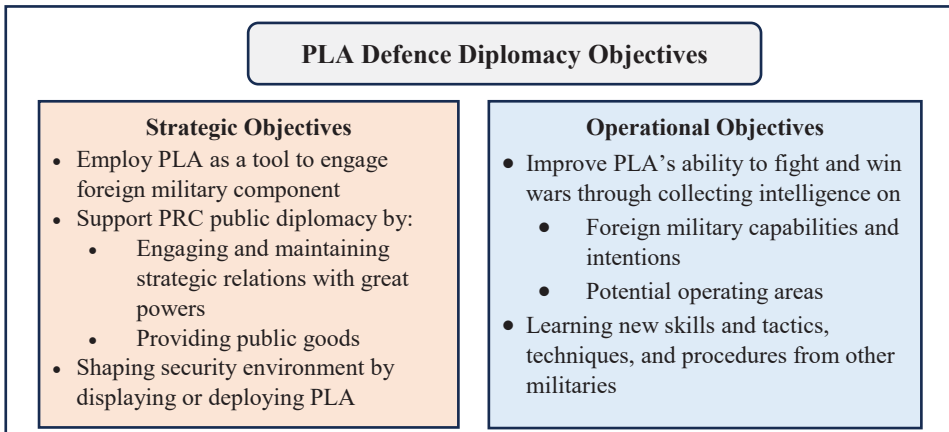
military training to personnel from various countries through the Global Peace Operations Initiative (GPOI) programme. US Africa command supports partners through a 3D approach—that is “Diplomacy, Development and Defence”. Apart from security cooperation and joint exercises with African countries, its efforts include the Africa Enlisted Development Strategy, which aims to standardise existing African professional military education institutions that can become regional centres of excellence.³⁹

3.2 Chinese Coherent Defence Diplomacy

3.2.1 Broad Concept

Defence diplomacy in the People’s Republic of China (PRC) is conducted by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CCP), setting broad foreign policy goals and the Central Military Commission (CMC) determines specific activities for various parts of the Peoples Liberation Army (PLA).

Figure 3: PLA’s Defence Diplomacy Objectives



Source: Author’s formulation from various literatures

Chinese leadership considers a coherent defence diplomacy strategy can “serve as a planning construct for a national strategy, contain actual or perceived enemies and spur national and military construction”.⁴⁰ Chinese military diplomacy objectives

³⁹ ‘What We Do’, accessed February 12, 2025, <https://www.africom.mil/what-we-do>.

⁴⁰ Kenneth Allen, Phillip C Saunders and John Chen, “Chinese Military Diplomacy, 2003–2016: Trends and Implications,” *China Strategic Perspectives* 11, (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 2017): 8, <chromeextension://efaidnbmnnpbpcjpcglcfindmkaj/http://www.dmrsc.com/DocumentUS/INSSreportChinaPerspectives.pdf>

are divided into strategic and operational categories (Figure: 3) which include broad foreign policy efforts through the development of soft power to create a favourable international image, shaping China's security environment, gathering intelligence, and learning from advanced military forces.⁴¹

3.2.2 *Functional Overview*

The defence diplomacy effort of China is multi-layered and synchronised in the employment of national resources to achieve strategic gain. The Ministry of National Defence is responsible for sending and controlling China's military attaches to guide them in the military's external work. China maintains military relations with more than 150 countries and employs MAs in more than 110 countries.⁴² The spectrum of PLA's military diplomatic activities spans five main broader areas. First, for senior-level meetings and visits, the Chinese defence minister is primarily responsible for hosting foreign defence ministers and senior foreign military leaders. However, senior PLA leaders significantly devote themselves to interacting with foreign military and civilian counterparts to promote Chinese foreign affairs and military-to-military interactions. Second, international military exercises, The PLA has historically been secretive and insular in engaging with foreign counterparts on operational matters. However, since 2002, it has begun to participate and conduct bilateral and multilateral exercises. PLA's recent willingness demonstrates its growing confidence in its capabilities and a greater propensity to shape China's security environment. Functional exchanges of the PLA include visiting expert delegations between Chinese and foreign militaries for operations, logistics, management and military medicine assistance is the third one. In addition, the PLA has military education and training exchange programmes with 25 friendly countries. Fourth, the PLA (Navy) conducts regular "friendly visits" where crews usually meet with Chinese ambassadors, MAs and host country-government and naval officials. The ships also remain open for the public, Chinese expatriates and students. Fifth is the participation in UN peacekeeping operations. Other components of Chinese defence diplomacy are also in practice in different engagement activities with the host nations of peacekeeping missions.

3.2.3 *Chinese Defence Diplomacy and Peacekeeping*

China deployed more than 50,000 troops in 20 different countries over the last 20 years. As of October 2024, a total of 1802 troops are deployed in different

⁴¹ Allen, Saunders and Chen, "Chinese Military Diplomacy", 1.

⁴² Matsuda Yasuhiro, "An Essay on China's Military Diplomacy: Examination of Intentions in Foreign Strategy," NIDS Security Report 8, no. no 3 (2006): 21–37, chromeextension://efaidnbmninnibpcjpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.nids.mod.go.jp/english/publication/kiyo/pdf/bulletin_e2006_2_Matsuda.pdf

peacekeeping missions, and it is the highest number among the permanent members of the UN Security Council.⁴³ China has many reasons for this larger deployment, such as to build a positive image, gain operational experience abroad, protect investments and support broader Chinese foreign policy goals through security assistance. Since 2015, most of China's blue helmets in South Sudan have been stationed near strategic oil pipelines and deposits to ensure China can oversee its investments.⁴⁴ In addition to protecting investments in South Sudan, China uses its peacekeeping presence to prevent conflicts from spreading to neighbouring countries like Uganda, Kenya, and Ethiopia, which host several important Chinese investments under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in East Africa.⁴⁵ China also takes endeavours to train TCC member and help them to develop their communicating capacity. Besides, China hosts seminars, symposiums and workshops at international peacekeeping forums, in which officials from major TCCs, financial contributors, and regional and international organizations and think tanks are invited to provide input on the reform and development of UN peacekeeping missions.

3.3 *Emerging Defence Diplomacy in India*

3.3.1 *Basic Strategy and Framework*

Strong civilian bureaucracies have so far barred the Indian military from engaging in defence diplomacy, however, the scenario is changing due to the wide and global commitment of members of the armed forces. Current practices include the exchange of visits at the level of defence minister and service chiefs, deployment of DAs/MAs, visits by national defence college teams abroad, seminars organised by defence-linked think tanks such as the Institute of Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA). The Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA) selects officers as MA/DA, and the main coordinating bodies for setting military-diplomatic goals are the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Defence, and the National Security Council.⁴⁶

3.3.2 *Functional Overview*

India, as an aspiring major power in South Asia, follows a comprehensive defence diplomacy framework to pursue national interest and global recognition. India is

⁴³ "Troop and Police Contributors," United Nations Peacekeeping, accessed February 11, 2025, <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/troop-and-police-contributors>.

⁴⁴ "China's Discourse and Interests Related to Its Role in U.N. Peacekeeping," accessed February 11, 2025, <https://jamestown.org/program/chinas-discourse-and-interests-related-to-its-role-in-u-n-peacekeeping/>.

⁴⁵ "Beijing's Blue Helmets: What to Make China's Role in UN Peacekeeping in Africa," n.d.

⁴⁶ Lt Gen Kamal Davar, "Military Diplomacy: A Vital Tool for Furthering National Interests," *Indian Defence Review*, April 17, 2018, <http://www.indiandefencereview.com/news/military-diplomacy-a-vital-tool-for-furthering-national-interests/>.

increasingly spreading its diplomatic footprint across the world. As of now, India has over 70 officers posted as DAs/MAs in 44 countries.⁴⁷ India has shown significant aspiration in defence export relations with small states in the Indian Ocean region besides its defence import from the US, Russia and Israel. So far, it has exported light helicopters to Nepal and Namibia, sonars to Myanmar, and offshore patrol vessels (OPV) to Mauritius and Sri Lanka. Besides, India is set to hand over Myanmar its first-ever submarine by 2020. India's 'Make in India' initiative also promotes the Transfer of Technology and intellectual property rights with the partner countries.⁴⁸ Indian military cooperation is growing in the form of bilateral, multinational exercises and multilateral security cooperation. Ex Sampriti, IN-BN CORPAT with Bangladesh, Ex IMBEX with MYANMAR, Operation Malabar with the US, perceptible role in IONS, the Quadrilateral Initiative with the US, Japan and Australia for ensuring maritime stability in Indo-Pacific are certain examples of India's far-reaching military diplomatic leads.

3.3.3 Indian Defence Diplomacy and Peacekeeping

The Indian military is one of the largest troop contributors in over 45 UN peacekeeping operations. Gradually it is expanding its peripheral influence both in UN headquarters and field missions, which would otherwise help to attain foreign policy objectives.⁴⁹ India's defence cooperation with African countries has been in a different stature in recent times. The cooperation is guided by three principles: keeping African priorities first, SAGAR (Security and Growth for All) and 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' (the World is One Family). The country's involvement in UN peacekeeping on the continent, maritime cooperation and training of defence officers are the three pillars of defence engagement with African countries.⁵⁰ On the basis of diplomatic reciprocity, Indian Defence Services Staff College and National Defence College host officer students from Western and Afro-Asian blocs. Similarly, many friendly foreign countries, including Bangladesh, enjoy training assistance from the Indian military due to their widespread professional reputation.⁵¹ However, India's increased maritime domain awareness programme may be the result of China's active engagement in the African continent under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).⁵² India's effort to explore defence markets in Africa through the India-Africa Defence Dialogue, the creation of more defence attaché posts in Africa and the series

⁴⁷ Davar, "Military Diplomacy."

⁴⁸ "Make in India: The Vision, New Processes, Sectors, Infrastructure and Mindset - Make in India," accessed August 15, 2024, <https://www.makeinindia.com/article/-/v/make-in-india-reason-vision-for-the-initiative>.

⁴⁹ Davar, "Military Diplomacy."

⁵⁰ Ruchita Beri, "Unpacking India's Defence Cooperation with Africa," n.d.

⁵¹ Davar, "Military Diplomacy."

⁵² Beri, "Unpacking India's Defence Cooperation."

of Africa–India Field Training Exercises (AFINDEX) provide a roadmap for how peacekeeping commitment of India has become instrumental in achieving political and economic goals.

3.4 Major Findings-Key Components of Defence Diplomacy in the Contemporary World

The defence diplomacy of the countries studied above has a comprehensive structure encompassing its conceptual and physical/functional dimensions. Defence diplomacy framework contributes in building of trust, global image between peacekeeping nation and UN, regional stakeholders and host country. Considering the contemporary experiences and practices, few components may be discerned for a better understanding of the defence diplomacy framework.

3.4.1 Conceptual Components

Four conceptual components can be found in analysing existing practices of defence diplomacy by the US, China and India in different peacekeeping missions. First, geostrategic influence is the constituents of diplomatic affairs that depend on the national interest in a specific geostrategic environment. Policies and goals are determined through a diverse diplomatic mechanism to attain national objectives, where defence diplomacy can play a vital role. Second is the Continuity of Policy Directives and its priorities, a well-defined national security policy, foreign and defence policy that endorses the use of the military in diplomatic roles and can set the doctrinal aspects of defence diplomacy. Third, Civil-Military Shared Perception, which enables a harmonised and synchronised effort between bureaucrats and defence apparatus to achieve national interests. And last one is Institutional Continuity, an institutional setup persuasive to national objectives that can set a coherent approach, maintain organisational memory, train individuals for diplomatic roles and create selection criteria.

3.4.2 Functional Components of Defence Diplomacy

Defence diplomacy relies significantly on the national capacity to project power, requiring both vertical and horizontal coordination with national diplomatic efforts. Four functional components suitable for defence diplomacy are discerned that may be applicable for defence diplomacy to enhance efficiency in peacekeeping. First, a rational military-diplomatic footprint and a rational deployment of DAs/MAs abroad help to advance national security objectives. Second, bilateral and multilateral defence engagements- the formal nature of multilevel visits of leadership, military working groups, experts and associated dialogues, bilateral and multilateral meetings, conferences, bilateral/multilateral operations/exercises and information sharing etc.,

would give military diplomacy an institutional character to build trust and confidence. Third is defence procurement and technology transfer which serves the complementary interests between two countries. Military/scientific higher education and training exchange programmes in universities/military institutions could be a significant diplomatic approach and the fourth component.

4. Bangladesh's UN Peacekeeping Commitment: Present State and Challenges

For Bangladesh's commitment to global peace, a major source of national motivation is Constitutional obligation. The commitment to establish peace and security emanates from the principles enshrined in the Constitution of Bangladesh. The Preamble to the Constitution reads "We may prosper in freedom and may make our full contribution towards international peace and co-operation in keeping with the progressive aspirations of mankind". Till May 2024, approximately two hundred thousand Bangladeshi peacekeepers have engaged in 63 operations in 43 countries to promote global peace. The Bangladeshi nature of the posture to operate in PKOs is professional, flexible, and culturally responsive. For instance, its reports on Africa, especially in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUSCO) and Sudan (UNMIS) have been praised for creating the needed local confidence and enhancing stability.⁵³

As of October 2024, 5,859 personnel are participating in peacekeeping activities across 17 missions, which is the third largest in the world.⁵⁴ According to the website of the AFD, presently UN peacekeepers from Bangladesh Army, Navy and Air Force are deployed in 08 ongoing UNPKOs in 08 countries. Within that, more than five thousand personnel from the Bangladesh Army are now deployed in various contingents or as Staff Officers/Military Observers.⁵⁵ Bangladesh Navy has its ships and watercraft deployed in UNIFIL (Lebanon) and UNMISS (South Sudan). The Air Force has its helicopters and fixed-wing aircraft in MONUSCO (DR Congo). Seven officers from Bangladesh Armed Forces are also working in UNDPKO.⁵⁶ However, Bangladesh does not hold any senior-level appointment in the Headquarters of UNDPKO. Bangladeshi peacekeepers have outperformed other countries with similar and even higher capabilities utilising their defence resources, personnel, armament and technologies. And also accoladed as the highest troops contributing countries

⁵³ Gugulethu Nyathi and Helda Risman, "Africa's Search for Peace and Stability: Defense Diplomacy and Conflict Resolution in The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)," *Jurnal Pertahanan: Media Informasi Ttg Kajian & Strategi Pertahanan Yang Mengedepankan Identity, Nasionalism & Integrity* 6 (2020): 138, <https://doi.org/10.33172/jp.v6i2.720>.

⁵⁴ The Business Post, "Bangladesh Committed to Establishing World Peace, Serving Humanity," May 29, 2024, <https://businesspostbd.com/national/bangladesh-committed-to-establishing-world-peace-serving-humanity>.

⁵⁵ "Ongoing Peacekeeping Missions Participated by Bangladesh," Armed Forces Division (AFD), accessed February 14, 2025, <https://afd.gov.bd/un-peacekeeping/ongoing-mission>.

⁵⁶ "Ongoing Peacekeeping Missions Participated."

multiple times by professionalism, dedication and discipline. However, critical analysis from the defence diplomacy lens shows multiple areas in which Bangladesh's efforts suffer due to challenges and limitations of the existing framework.

4.1 Evolving Notions and Logistics Challenges in Peacekeeping Commitments

The challenges of peacekeeping missions change as time passes. More and more missions are focused on protecting civilians, and on dealing with threats such as terrorism and organised crime. Nyathi and Risman state that these shifts necessitate specialised training and robust operational frameworks.⁵⁷ While its contributions are highly commendable, Bangladesh has not been able to meet its peacekeeping commitments because of the changing dynamics of warfare and technology-driven arsenal. Financial constraints are still a substantial barrier to overcome, and a sustainable funding mechanism for peacekeeping missions is necessary. In addition, logistical limitations, such as poor transport and communication infrastructure also come into play.

4.2 Strategic Communication and Soft Power in Peacekeeping

Defence diplomacy and strategic communication are two very important aspects of foreign policy; they allow nations to represent their soft power and credibility around the world. Some scholars⁵⁸ point out that Bangladesh's peacekeeping contributions have been very instrumental to its global image, and the opportunities for leveraging these communication tools exist on a greater level. By showcasing success stories in media, diplomatic channels, and academic forums, Bangladesh can raise its profile as a reliable peacekeeping partner. Moreover, cultural diplomacy, like language training and cultural exchange programs, can be used to create stronger bonds with host nations. The peacekeeping notion for Bangladesh is idealistic, which means promoting global peace. The engagement of Services Headquarters and peacekeeping force with the host nations' defence apparatus may result in cooperation at the root level, but strategic communication will not be achieved. Therefore, Bangladesh could achieve very little or no success in the field of development and defence cooperation in the African countries.

⁵⁷ Gugulethu Linda Nyathi and Helda Risman, "Africa's Search for Peace and Stability: Defense Diplomacy and Conflict Resolution in The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)," *Jurnal Pertahanan: Media Informasi Ttg Kajian & Strategi Pertahanan Yang Mengedepankan Identity, Nasionalism & Integrity* 6, no. 2 (2020): 138, <https://doi.org/10.33172/jp.v6i2.720>.

⁵⁸ Author's interview with M Ashique Rahman and Tarek Hasan Semul, Senior researchers in BISS, interviewed on 12 February 2025

4.3 Absence of National Policy Level Direction: Resulting in Apprehensive Civil-military Relationship

As Exner-Pirot explains, citing the case of Arctic search-and-rescue operations, civil-military cooperation and coordination must take place between civilian and military forces to ensure and cement the trust that is most essential for success. However, the politico-military approach to diplomacy in Bangladesh remains weak, reactive and ad hoc. Due to the unawareness of political leaders about the strategic aspects of defence diplomacy, the Bangladesh Armed Forces is yet to be fully engaged in one of its essential roles.⁵⁹ Since the effectiveness of defence diplomacy depends on the objectives of the government, a well-defined foreign policy is needed to determine the core aspects of defence diplomacy. The MoFA is considered the sole authority for matters relating to international relations, which sometimes stands in the way of defence diplomacy, ignoring the possibilities of military power as an ambassador of peace, stability and humanitarian response. Defence Policy 2018 recognised defence diplomacy as one of the three pillars of defence diplomacy.⁶⁰ There are no guidelines regarding the defence diplomacy framework and its coordination with other principles—a commitment to global peace and stability. The lack of trust between military and civilian bureaucrats due to scepticism and power rivalry seemingly hinders the development of coherent military diplomacy.⁶¹

4.4 Military Diplomats- Inadequacy in Number and Training

The success and effectiveness of defence diplomacy depend mostly on an individual's intellectual ability, personal affiliation, and ability to engage and influence the diplomatic affairs of the host country very professionally. Bangladesh has nine missions in African continent but only one Embassy in Ethiopia has a defence wing. The absence of any appropriate selection criteria by the services, which is very crucial, is another limitation to the current practice of defence diplomacy. One of the Senior Armed Forces Officers⁶² opined that a lack of diplomatic understanding perceptibly poses manifold challenges while discharging such sensitive duties in a completely different environment. The perception prevails that appropriate training and education will equip the defence officers to undertake defence engagements with diplomatic acumen in the mission area.

⁵⁹ Lt Col SM Khalid, "Military Diplomacy: An Essential Constituents of Foreign Policy," Bangladesh Army Journals, (2015): 40.

⁶⁰ Armed Forces Division, "Extract of the Defence Diplomacy of the People's Republic of Bangladesh," [Year?]pp 2.

⁶¹ Gp Capt MS Alam, "Military Diplomacy-A Tool to Pursue Foreign Policy," MIRPUR PAPERS, (2013): 9.

⁶² Author's interview with a senior military official posted at the Directorate General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI), Bangladesh, who wished to remain anonymous.

4.5 Lack of Research and Innovation

A periodic assessment of defence diplomacy is required for its unremitting application over time and space. However, so far in Bangladesh, defence diplomacy has been the least studied and researched area. Rigorous research and innovative ideas by institutions like the Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BIISS), Foreign Service Academy (FSA), National Defence College (NDC), Bangladesh Institute of Maritime Research and Development (BIMRAD) and Bangladesh Public Administration Training Centre (BPATC) may suggest appropriate steps and direction of defence diplomacy.⁶³

To summarise, Bangladesh's peacekeeping efforts may be evaluated on the scale of conceptual and functional components, which are contextualised from the practices of the contemporary world. Bangladesh has limited progress in the aspect of geostrategic influence, continuity of policy directives, civil-military shared perception, and institutional continuity. In broader defence diplomacy components geostrategic influence somehow prevails as the country has defence exchange, cooperation and engagement with neighbouring and Western countries. However, the country has very limited defence exchange with African nations. In regard to functional components military-diplomatic footprint, bilateral and multilateral defence engagements, and defence procurement and technology transfer are literally in limbo in the concept of peacekeeping in Bangladesh. Military/scientific higher education and training exchange programmes in universities/military institutions are somehow in practice as Bangladesh has training exchanges with different African countries. Therefore, a comprehensive defence diplomacy framework is essential for Bangladesh to enhance its efficiency in UN peacekeeping missions. Discussed in the next section, an attempt is made to suggest such a framework for Bangladesh.

5. Defence Diplomacy and Efficiency in UN Peacekeeping Missions - A Comprehensive Framework

Conceptual understanding of defence diplomacy/peacekeeping, contemporary defence diplomacy and peacekeeping practices by the US, China and India, and existing practices in Bangladesh were discussed in the previous sections. 'Defence plus diplomacy' is not the correct manifestation of the vision, policy, conceptual and functional components of defence diplomacy. Apparently, defence diplomacy is not only the job of military diplomats who are posted as DA/MA. This section endeavours to propose a 'framework' of defence diplomacy so that peacekeeping can create a positive mark in the achievement of national interest. It is to be noted that suggestions

⁶³ Khalid, "Military Diplomacy."

and recommendations made in this section that lay out a comprehensive defence diplomacy framework for Bangladesh are drawn from author's research as delineated in the discussion of previous sections of this paper but also from author's KIIs with academics, senior military officials, researcher and both former and present commanders of various UN peacekeeping missions.

5.1 National Level Coordination Body for Defence Diplomacy and Peacekeeping

Bangladesh's foreign policy is derived from a close enquiry of her national interests that mostly emanates from Article 25 of the constitution that stipulates promotion of international peace, security and solidarity, an idealist notion for global peace. Defence diplomacy, a fundamental pillar of Defence Policy, should be able to ensure congruence of defence policy and foreign policy in light of national security policy.⁶⁴ As noted by a researcher, in the context of Bangladesh, the absence of National Security Policy and the lack of guidance in the Defence Policy poses a void of macro-level guidelines for both defence diplomacy and peacekeeping commitment.⁶⁵ It has also been noted that ensuring national security with progressive development would necessitate all elements of national power, to be employed appropriately and effectively. In this context, a comprehensive national security strategy should be enacted, counting the defence resources within the country's overall diplomatic framework.

Defence diplomacy is a long-term process and should not be vulnerable to short-term crises. In France, for example, military and defence cooperation is under the control of the Department of Military Cooperation and Defence at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (DCMD), while supervision of bilateral diplomatic defence networks in French embassies falls to the Department of International and Strategic Relations (DGRIS) at the Ministry of Defence, the latter run by a diplomat but with a high concentration of military personnel.⁶⁶ For Bangladesh, MoFA, as the lead organisation to deal with foreign affairs, should make the best use of defence resources in attaining foreign policy objectives. Besides, the Ministry of Defence (MoD), AFD, overseas diplomatic missions, and think tanks, such as BISS, institutions such as the Directorate General Forces of Intelligence (DGFI), and NDC have the potential to contribute to the field of defence diplomacy. A 'standing

⁶⁴ Armed Forces Division, "Extract of the Defence Diplomacy of the People's Republic of Bangladesh," [Year?]pp 2.

⁶⁵ Author's interview with M Ashique Rahman, Senior Research Fellow, Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS).

⁶⁶ Charillon, Balzacq and Ramel, "Defense Diplomacy," 277.

committee⁶⁷ may be formed, comprising representatives from all stakeholders for successive collaboration and delineation of responsibilities.

AFD should be responsible headquarters to select the appropriate candidate to be posted as DA/MA in the overseas missions. It can develop the policy, specifying the selection criteria such as service experience and training requirements etc. Formal education and training in defence diplomacy will create confident and knowledgeable military officers in carrying out diplomatic duties. As such, the subject can be prioritised during higher and mid-level staff courses in addition to a formal training programme for officers selected as military diplomats. Besides, selected officers should receive training/working knowledge on IR/diplomacy before their employment. A clear selection criteria and policy are needed for including diplomats in the UN Contingent to advise the Contingent commander on foreign policy matters.

In regard to peacekeeping, the standing committee of defence diplomacy should have an objective to coordinate national-level activities to pursue national interests. UN Wing of MoFA and Ops and Plan Directorate of AFD to be the focal points for steering defence diplomacy in different peacekeeping mission areas. Appropriate officers may be posted to the UN Wing of MoFA from AFD and vice-versa to coordinate functional aspects of foreign policy priorities and deployment of defence resources. After receiving the short, medium and long-term plans, a defence diplomacy strategy with a proposed action plan for a specified period may be formulated. It may also determine the coordination process between MoFA, Service Headquarters and other stakeholders, besides overseeing the progress of the roadmap for achieving the strategic ends.

5.2 Exploring National Interest through Geostrategic Engagement

A typical diplomatic approach with a lack of foreign policy priority may not be able to create the desired impact when exploring national interests in an evolving geostrategic environment. Defence engagement with other nation-states may prefer cooperation, collaboration and confidence-building measures; some may be persuaded for shared development of defence industries and technologies, while building the image through professionalism may be the main focus to secure key positions, such as in UNDPKO. Therefore, identifying geostrategic interests would ensure the correct application of defence diplomacy activities while engaging with different nation-states.

⁶⁷ Recommendation for forming a high-level functional and coordination body is made during author's interview with Colonel Tarekul Islam, Colonel Staff, Operations and Plans Directorate, Armed Forces Division (AFD).

Bangladesh's experience in Sierra Leone can be cited as an example of how the country failed to leverage their success of peacekeeping. Bangladesh was the highest TCC in the mission area while other TCCs were withdrawing their troops because of increased violence. Recognising 'Bangla' as the second language and visit of the President Ahmed Tajen Kabbah in October 2003 to Bangladesh are significant achievements of the peacekeeping mission. Peacebuilding efforts and security sector reform in Sierra Leone by the British Armed Forces continued till 2014, whereas Bangladeshi peacekeepers returned to the country by 2007.⁶⁸ Therefore, Bangladesh should be prepared to take part efficiently in the rebuilding of the security sector in the war-ravaged country. An expert academic⁶⁹ noted, Bangladesh should explore both tangible, such as political, social and economic interests and intangible interests, such as image building, taking leverage from peacekeeping commitment. Strategic engagement in peacekeeping may provide an opportunity to explore areas where Bangladesh can get involved to rebuild affected security sectors. At country's end, effort needs to be taken to showcase capability and capacity to rebuild service-oriented structure. The investment in social capital will indirectly promote a positive image of the country.

Modernisation of Armed Forces through the development of the indigenous defence industry and the transfer of technology are other driving factors to cement sustained strategic engagement with African countries. Indonesia's aspiration for UN participation can be mentioned here. UN participation helps Indonesia to enhance its diplomatic reputation, strengthen bilateral and multilateral relations and support the development of its defence industry.⁷⁰ Bangladesh has limited indigenous capabilities to have various defence-related products produced by its key institutions viz., Bangladesh Ordnance Factory, Bangladesh Machine Tools Factory and Bangladesh Diesel Plant. Bangladesh, with its limited capability, should explore all the opportunities to establish defence cooperation in the field of defence development.⁷¹ UN reimbursement against Contingent Own Equipment (COE) provides an opportunity to equip Bangladesh Armed Forces with modern platforms, equipment and weapons. For example, the BD Army bought APCs, the BN bought 14 high-speed boats in Sudan, and the BAF purchased helicopters to meet the UN requirements.

⁶⁸ Lieutenant Colonel Md Aftab Hossain, "Modern Peacekeeping Operations: Implications on Preparedness of Bangladesh Armed Forces," NDC E-Journal 14, no. 1 (Dhaka: 2015): 10.

⁶⁹ Author's interview with Mohammad Atique Rahman, Associate Professor, Department of International Relations, University of Dhaka.

⁷⁰ Kemala Oktreza, Rodon Pedrason and Rizerius Eko Hadisancoko, "Defense Diplomacy Strategies through Peacekeeping Missions: A Comparison of China and Indonesia," n.d., pp 619.

⁷¹ Author's interview with Shibly Noman, Operation Officer in Bangladesh Ordnance Factory on 15 February 2025.

5.3 Overseas Mission in Africa- Short, Mid and Long-Term Measure

Out of nine Bangladeshi diplomatic missions in Africa, only the Embassy in Ethiopia has a defence wing which is less than the actual requirement. A rational expansion of defence wings is necessary for the specific attainment of military-diplomatic objectives. As a short-term fix, diplomats from MoFA may be included in the mission contingent with necessary support elements. Besides, the foreign ministry may endeavour to open temporary missions in all old and matured missions in Cote d'Ivoire, Liberia, Sudan, South Sudan, DR Congo and Mali to establish relations with host countries. Similar suggestion was made by former Deputy Commander of UN peacekeeping mission in DR Congo.⁷² According to him, establishment of embassies or high commissions are required to pursue national interests of any country for promoting trade and investment as well as enhancing security and strategic interests. This may build a positive image of the country and will have direct impact in better understanding between government, people and the peacekeepers. Even the establishment of regional embassy or high commission may be considered to assist the peacekeeping forces to pursue national interest. In this aspect, Bangladesh peacekeepers in the region and country may assist in maintaining liaison with high officials of UN and host countries. Hence, all required efforts should be rendered to open embassies/high commissions in African countries to yield maximum strategic and development engagement as a long-term measure.

5.4 Economic Cooperation and Collaboration

The economic potentials of the host countries can be explored by becoming their development partner. Careful investments in various sectors would render dividends to our national economy. In African countries, Bangladesh can contribute immensely to the agriculture, tannery, pharmaceuticals and ready-made garment sector. Moreover, the Bangladesh Armed Forces' expertise in nation-building may be utilised as a contribution to infrastructure reform.

Ambassador M Riaz Hamidullah said in a seminar of BISS that relationships are not simply defined by shared values but by a combination of shared values, mutual trust, respect, and importantly, the mutuality of interests.⁷³ High-level visits of influential political and military leaders should be arranged to showcase the capabilities of Bangladesh in economic cooperation and collaboration. The visits are important to enhance values and mutual trust between the countries. Different interested ministries and organisations like the Ministry of Commerce (MoC),

⁷² Author's interview with Brigadier General Mizanur Rahman, afwc, psc, Former Deputy Commander, Eteri Brigade, United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the DR Congo (MONUSCO).

⁷³ Proceedings of "Bangladesh-Malaysia Relations" (paper presented at a seminar in BISS, 15 September 2024).

Ministry of Industry (MoI), Ministry of Agriculture (MoA), the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce & Industries (FBCCI) and Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) should be integrated into the team to attract the delegation's member. The contribution of think tank organisations and academia should also be kept in mind to publishing books, journal articles and other scholarly work to promote perception-shared development. A holistic approach will be more beneficial to divulge the mutuality of interest through development and cooperation.

5.5 Enhanced Engagement through Training/Seminars/Visits

Every year a substantial number of senior and mid-level military officers from the US, China, India, Myanmar, Middle East and African countries attend courses in Bangladesh. Notably, the officers who are participating in different military courses are appointed as DAs/MAs in Bangladesh. As such, the personal contact and interaction developed between military officers can be exploited for diplomatic purposes. Contrarily, a large number of officers and men travel abroad for training, seminars and inspections, which is an important means of defence engagement. The destination and number of officers undertaking training in different countries are not available in the open source. During an interview, a senior military officer opines that despite a wide range of visits/training engagement by Bangladesh Armed Forces, there is a significant lack of engagement with the African countries, in which Bangladesh Armed Forces successfully completed UN mission. Due consideration may be given to enhance the engagement of multilevel officers and soldiers. Identical opinions are expressed by another Deputy Commander of an UN peacekeeping mission who said that provision of education, training and other material assistance to the host countries through peacekeeping forces have immense impact in the relationship. Bangladesh Armed Forces undertakes this sort of endeavour case to case basis but a well-coordinated and implementable plan is necessary to have sustained effect.⁷⁴

Joint exercises, training and workshops are vivid ways of building mutual trust and confidence in the contemporary spectrum of defence diplomacy. Joint Exercise 'Shantir Ogroshena' in 2021 and, the 26th Annual Conference of International Association of Peace Training Centres in 2022 on UN peacekeeping were the two events hosted by Bangladesh. Periodical international joint exercises will leverage

⁷⁴ Author's interview with Colonel Tarek Hossain, Deputy Commander, Eteri Brigade, United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the DR Congo (MONUSCO).

Bangladesh to build interoperability and showcase training and defence potentials to the interested countries.

5.6 Bangladesh’s Diplomatic Endeavour--Protocols/Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)/Agreements

According to the Armed Forces Division’s data, since its independence, Bangladesh has signed 19 defence-related MoUs with 11 countries, and the number of pending MoUs in discussion is 27.⁷⁵ Mr Hasan argued that in recent years, many of the major regional and global powers expressed their interest in strengthening their defence relations with Bangladesh. For example, Bangladesh had three military dialogues with Turkey since 2015 and one in 2022 with the United Kingdom. Interoperability, maritime domain awareness, capacity building in HADR, counterterrorism, peacekeeping, technological enhancement, and maritime security were the important tag words in the dialogues. However, the number of defence protocols/MoUs/agreements shown below indicates two aspects: a small number and no MoUs with African countries. During the interview, most resource personnel suggested that Bangladesh may seize the opportunities to engage with African countries through military agreements/protocols. A senior military official recommends that Bangladesh should pursue more MoUs with African nations where we already have goodwill due to our UNPKO contributions.⁷⁶ This will assist the national leadership to have leverage in other sectors by enhancing defence engagement.

Table 3: Bangladesh’s Defence MoUs (Since independence to April 2024)⁷⁷

Serial	Countries	Bangladesh’s Defence Memorandum of Understanding	
		Signed	Pending
1	Australia	-	01
2	China	01	02
3	France	02	01
4	India	05	06
5	Japan	01	01
6	Kuwait	01	-

⁷⁵ Proceedings of “Defence Diplomacy: Strategy for Bangladesh” (paper presented at a seminar in BISS, 18 April 2024) pp 21.

⁷⁶ Colonel Tarekul Islam, Colonel Staff, Operations and Plans Directorate, Armed Forces Division, mentioned this during an interview with the author.

⁷⁷ Colonel Tarekul Islam, Colonel Staff, Operations and Plans Directorate, Armed Forces Division, mentioned this during an interview with the author.

7	Qatar	02	-
8	Russia	02	05
9	Saudia Arabia	01	03
10	Turkey	03	03
11	United Kingdom	01	02
12	United States	-	03
	Total	19	27

5.7 *Publicity and Branding to Build Idealistic Image*

The exemplary professionalism and success of Bangladeshi peacekeepers have branded Bangladesh Armed Forces as the role model in upholding global peace in UNPKO. This hard-earned reputation offers huge opportunities to complement national foreign policy objectives. The skill displayed by peacekeepers in resolving international crises has created a positive image of Bangladesh to the UN. The reputation helped to promote overall diplomatic relations with developed countries like the US, and members of the UN Security Council.

Promoting military-diplomatic activities is essential in public diplomacy, where the media has a significant role to play. The recent shift in public diplomacy from traditional media to social media tools has allowed information to flow across multiple networks instead of a single controlled channel. Despite the risk of misappropriation of information, this opens up opportunities for a multi-pronged diplomatic approach. In that context, defence diplomacy needs development through sound research and analysis because of its novelty in Bangladesh.⁷⁸ BISS, Public universities, NDC, and BIMRAD may play a leading role in this aspect for its seamless blending with the mainstream diplomacy of the country.

6. Conclusion

Bangladesh’s remarkable contributions to UN peacekeeping are underutilised as a strategic tool for advancing its national and international objectives. Thus, this paper aims to bridge the gap by proposing a comprehensive framework for defence diplomacy and Bangladesh’s participation in UN peacekeeping. In the scholarly literature peacekeeping remains a vibrant component of defence diplomacy and the conceptual link between defence diplomacy and peacekeeping is quite evident in the

⁷⁸ This suggestion has been made during the author’s interview with Abul kalam Azad, Professor of International Relations, Bangladesh University of Professionals and former Professor of Jahangirnagar University.

literature. The components and objectives of peacekeeping are discerned, through the study of different literature.

Few Western and Asian countries have well-defined defence diplomacy frameworks to achieve foreign policy objectives. The defence diplomacy practices of the US, China and India are discussed in the paper to identify the conceptual and functional components of defence diplomacy in the contemporary world. However, the idealist and the realist perspective of peacekeeping commitment both are discussed here to get some clarity on how nation-states pursue national interests. Four conceptual and four functional components are identified by analysing existing practices of defence diplomacy of the US, China and India in different peacekeeping missions. Geostrategic influence, continuity of policy directives and their priorities, civil-military shared perception and institutional continuity are the four conceptual components. Whereas, rational military-diplomatic footprint, bilateral and multilateral defence engagements, defence procurement and technology transfer, and military/scientific higher education and training exchange are the four functional components.

As of October 2024, 5,859 personnel from Bangladesh are participating in peacekeeping activities across 17 missions, which is the third largest number in the world. According to the AFD website, presently, UN peacekeepers from Bangladesh Army, Navy and Air Force are deployed in eight ongoing UNPKOs in eight countries. The peacekeeping legacy brought enormous name and fame to Bangladesh, a third-world developing country. Evidently, Bangladesh had more to achieve, considering its larger footprint in the field of peacekeeping. For that, it is important to catalogue challenges and limitations in present defence diplomacy and peacekeeping framework which are barring to achieve desired efficiency. Discerned challenges are: logistics challenges, absence of strategic communication and soft power, lack of national policy level direction, apprehensive civil-military relationship, inadequacy of military diplomats and lack of research and innovation. Bangladesh has limited progress in respect of geostrategic influence, continuity of policy directives, civil-military shared perception, and institutional continuity. In regard to functional components present state of military-diplomatic footprint, bilateral and multilateral defence engagements, and defence procurement and technology transfer also need improvement. Military/scientific higher education and training exchange programmes in universities/military institutions are somehow in practice as Bangladesh has training exchanges with different African countries.

In the paper, an attempt has been made to formulate a comprehensive framework of defence diplomacy to enhance Bangladesh's efficiency in UN peacekeeping

commitments taking guidance from the constitution, foreign policy, defence policy, contemporary defence diplomacy and peacekeeping practices by the US, China and India, and existing challenges in Bangladesh's peacekeeping. Findings from rigorous research based on secondary sources are complemented and buttressed by inputs from key informant interviews of academics, researcher and senior military officials. It is suggested that a comprehensive defence diplomacy framework for Bangladesh needs to include few components. A national-level standing committee for defence diplomacy and peacekeeping is proposed, making MoFA and AFD the highest coordinating body for defence diplomacy. Comprehensive geostrategic engagement with the African nations is significant mostly in the areas of security sector reform, shared modernisation and cooperation in defence development. Considering the presence of only one defence wing in the African continent, MoFA in coordination with AFD may undertake short, mid and long-term measures to increase overseas diplomatic missions. Economic cooperation and collaboration should be focused on with high priority to cash in, on the advantage of peacekeeping presence. In this regard, high-level visits and promotion of national resources should be planned to yield maximum benefits. Bangladesh needs to have enhanced engagement with the African nations through the exchange of training/seminars/visits. Ministries, think tanks (international and national), public universities and organisations will be included in the framework to make it more comprehensive. Bangladesh should also endeavour to have more protocols/MoUs/agreements with the host countries to have deeper engagements. Publicity and branding are also vital to divulge a positive image of the development works that are intended to stabilise the war-ravaged country or society. In conclusion, a comprehensive defence diplomacy framework is sine qua non to maximise the success achieved through peacekeeping.